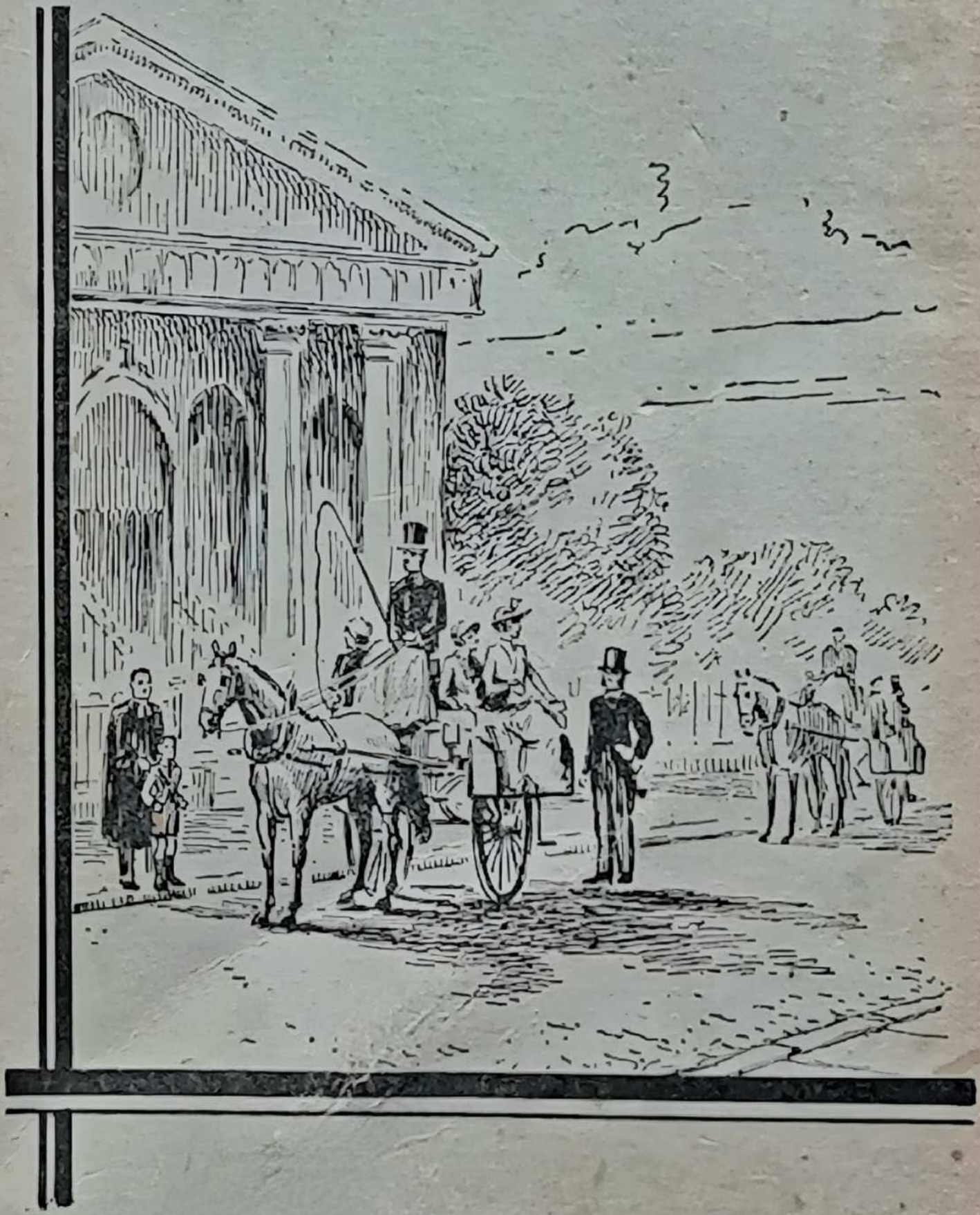
ELDERS' DAUGHTERS



THE QUOTA PRESS

ELDERS' DAUGHTERS

BY

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THE BUSH THAT BURNED, TYRONE AMONG THE BUSHES,
MANSE LARKS, ETC.

"Yonder a lad and his lass go sauntering by,
Their tale will go onward the same, though dynasties die."

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KILDARRAGH MEETING-HOUSE

Oh! for Kildarragh Meeting-house, where I sat when a lad,
When sight and sound and wind are gone I'll mind the smell it had,
And when I reach the golden gates I think the Heavenly air
Will have that sacred fust that laid the backs of Bibles bare.

Its windows were just windows made for letting in the light,
And whiles we looked out through them and thanked the Lord for sight,
We saw His birds, His clouds, His trees—surely these things surpass
The heathen's painted images on variegated glass.

In God's House on Kildarragh Hill I think I see the man
Dared stand up in its pulpit sayin' *hymn* in place of *psalm*.
He'd turn to stone ere our four walls would hear a human lilt;
We had our faults but free we were from such presumptuous guilt.

Our minister—I left him last—for I may hold my
tongue,
A man content that most his pay was hearts that round
him clung,
His castor hat, his white cravat, his doctrine, all were
soun',
And when he touched upon the Pope—he'd tear his
pulpit gown!

'Tis a brave step to Kildarragh, but it's there I be to
rest,
For "the sands of time are sinking," and my sun is in
the West.
And if in God's House forever my dwelling-place shall
be,
'Twas because in His great mercy Kildarragh nurtured
me.

—*L. M. F.*

CHAPTER I.

KILDARRAGH MEETING-HOUSE

"O sweeter than the marriage-feast
'Tis sweeter far to me,
To walk together to the kirk
In a goodly company."

No stained glass windows excluded God's precious light and sunshine from entering Kildarragh Meeting-house, and on this soul-stirring morning of His never failing Spring we sang exultingly :

The lofty heavens proclaim
The majesty of God.

And whilst doing so could survey the "ethereal sky" adorned by snowy masses of clouds careering over it as though they shared in the general rejoicing that now the dark dismal days of Winter had gone at last.

And afterwards when singing—but this time tremulously and to the tune of "Ballerma"—

The end and measure of my days
O God make me to know,

our eyes unconsciously sought the grassy hillocks of "The Green" where slept until the Resurrection morn "our loved and lost awhile."

The sunshine streamed into the meeting-house and over the high-backed pews, it gilded the drab walls, even mounted the high pulpit and turned the fair hair of its tall young occupant to gold. But alas! in its persistency it showed up the black coats of the older menfolk to have a greenish hue and the dolmens of the women to have lost many of their original decorative beads.

On either side of the pulpit was a roomy square pew, each occupied by an elder's family. The Gordon pew to the right, held the acknowledged first family of the congregation. At its snugly closed door sat Henry Gordon, whom from casual observation his southern fellow-countrymen might have dubbed a "dour-looking Ulster Presbyterian," yet would have to concede an air of breeding to the straight upright figure and stern cast of countenance. Scion of an old Plantation family, he prided himself on the fact that neither for fear nor favour had a Gordon forerunner disavowed the Covenanting blood that ran in his veins. By his side sat his sister, the "Aunt Matilda" of the three young people sitting opposite. She had lived all her blameless life in the home of her birth, and after the passing of the gentle mother who had drooped under the rigid Gordon régime, had honestly done her best to try and fill that dearly-loved mother's place in the lives of Eunice, Alice and Jim.

Alice—now fifteen, herself looked a true Gordon, but Eunice the eldest and Jim the youngest seemed to have sprung from a far different temperamental class. To Eunice the mother had bequeathed the pansy eyes, the full red lips, the radiant expression of kindliness and mirth. The eyes alone seemed to stamp the elder daughter as a changeling in that grey-eyed Gordon pew, were it not that Jim shared somewhat her mobile cast of features.

Of lesser degree from a social point of view, yet still of importance, was the family worshipping in the corresponding pew opposite. These were the McBriars of "The Hollow." You could easily place John McBriar as a typical well-to-do "strong" Ulster farmer. The

long shaven upper lip and sandy beard, the eyes that looked you straight in the face—humorous yet unflinching—had an air of "standing no nonsense." Elder McBriar was indeed an unusually genial specimen, although to-day for some reason or other he looked irritated. Even during sermon-time he would occasionally glance behind, whereupon his fair eldest daughter, Christina, would flush, yet kept her eyes on the preacher's face, as she had been brought up to do. Christina intuitively knew that there was one worshipper that day in Kildarragh who, so her father thought, had no right to be there.

It happened to be the first anniversary of the Reverend Hugh Adair's ordination in Kildarragh. On announcing his text, "The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places, yea, I have a goodly heritage," a decorous smile passed over the faces of his hearers as they sought to verify in their Bibles with moistened thumbs, then leant back, arms folded and faces upraised exhibiting pleasurable anticipation. And their expectations were evidently justified, for when the sermon ended one could hear the rustle of relaxation breaking the absolute stillness of the last tense forty minutes.

Mr. Gordon and Mr. McBriar then rose, and advancing to the bench underneath the pulpit, each armed himself with a long-handled collection box and proceeded to take up the collection.

The preoccupation that sat on Elder McBriar's brow must have been responsible for his absent-minded conduct in what followed. His own pew came first, and to it he presented the receptacle upside down, naturally causing intense amusement to the contributors. "Meeting" was the last place to look for entertainment. His

little daughters, Nellie and Agnes, were convulsed by giggles, and even his grown-up son and daughter Bob and Christina—could not exert enough self-control to keep their faces to true meeting-house pattern. As for their mother, she felt utterly abashed as, after hastily reversing the offending object with great presence of mind, she gave as severe a look as she could muster up round the pew and then seemed to experience some difficulty in keeping her own face normal. All struggled more or less successfully to have vacant expressions on their father's return, who resumed his seat with an intimidating look that only served to almost set them off again.

The congregation turned their backs to the minister for the concluding prayer, some with devoutly closed eyes and others just gazing at the backs in front of them. Contrary to upbringing, Christina opened her eyes but closed them again hastily on encountering the direct gaze of Gideon Blair. "Old hypocrite," she said to herself, "surely he wasn't looking at me." A few minutes later she ventured again to raise her eyelids and met the adoring gaze of Archie McKillop and she was satisfied.

A paraphrase concluded the service. The precentor struck his tuning-fork against the seat, held it a moment to his ear and dashed into "Artaxerxes." He got little help generally from the congregation, especially the menfolk, but one rich voice—a woman's—of remarkable power could be heard over all the others—that of Susan Stacey in the front pew.

Scarcely was the "Amen" of the Benediction pronounced when a stampede commenced for the door, in which the Gordon pew did not participate. It sat in

dignified silence for at least three minutes, and emerged just as the minister arrived at the foot of the pulpit stairs. There followed the usual hand-shaking, and, as always, Aunt Matilda claimed his escort down the aisle and even to the gate. Though far other were his inclinations he acquiesced pleasantly.

Here two jaunting cars waited. The Gordon opposite the gate, and the McBriar a respectful distance behind. The minister stood bareheaded and gave one and then the other a send-off. The McBriar turned the corner, yet still he stood watching the other till it was out of sight, and a little longer. Then he went back to the "Session room" for his hat, and started in the opposite direction for his Manse on the hill.

CHAPTER II.

THE HOLLOW

Home at "The Hollow," the McBriar family sat down to dinner in the kitchen living-room, Mr. McBriar and Bob in their shirt sleeves, Mrs. McBriar and Christina in second-best dresses and the little girls in pinafores.

What a heartsome place that kitchen was! Ever warm from the generous fire that blazed in the wide open grate over which comfortable fat kettles hung perpetually from the "crane" "on the boil." One window looked to the morning sun, while through the other opposite came in the evening the glow of the sunset. Inside its busy walls one was inspired with hope and good cheer and comfort on the darkest day.

The Sunday dinner of boiled bacon and cabbage had been cooked by Peter, the "servant boy," whom his mistress had trained in that capacity. He himself sat at the end of the table nearest the door—as it were "below the salt"—and occasionally joined in any conversational matter that interested him.

For a time, however, no sounds were heard save the clatter of knives and forks to the accompaniment of smacking lips. Then when appetites were somewhat whetted Mrs. McBriar made the remark that she was in the habit of making at this stage every Sunday.

"There was a brave congregation out the day."

"Middlin'," conceded her husband, "but it wasn't all our own ones." He took a sharp look at his eldest daughter on saying this. But Christina appeared quite

unconcerned in the subject, at which marked indifference he spoke more plainly and to the point.

"That McKillop fellow comes a dale too often to Kildarragh." And he stuck his fork into a potato on the dish as though he was thrusting a dagger into that unfavourably regarded young man's heart.

"Mebbe," soothed Mrs. McBriar, "he likes our man's preachin'."

"I don't believe he would know the odds between good and bad preachin'."

"Well," said his wife, "I don't wonder that the Killyclabber people comes to us now an' then, for their man's ill to listen to for a constancy."

"Aye, that's the truth," agreed her husband, "his matter's poor stuff, an' as for his delivery, he has none at all. But sure they saw the way he shaped the day he preached on trial, an' when they took him, let them thole him."

"He reads his sermons, forbye," supplemented Mrs. McBriar.

"To be sure he does. If a hen lit on the pulpit he couldn't lift his head to shoo her off."

"The way he got Killyclabber, the people are pleased to say, was because them rich people that belong to it—the McIlhiggins—were all for him, thinkin' he had a notion of thon or'nary daughter of theirs; but no sooner was he settled nor he brought home a Belfast lady—so that put him out of office with them."

The elder didn't seem to be paying much attention to his wife's explanation of the Killyclabber settlement. He had crossed his knife and fork and pushed his plate away from him to signify that he had quite finished.

"Them 'skerries,'" he said appreciatively, "are a dinner in themselves."

"Aye," agreed Mrs. McBriar, "there's nothing to beat them yet, no matter how the 'champions' are cracked up."

"I was talkin' in the Green this mornin," announced Mr. McBriar, "to Gideon Blair, an' I asked him to come for his tea this evenin'. He was tellin' me that he was in a mind to bid for Brodison's farm that marches his own. Believe me, Gideon will be a full man yet afore he dies."

At this point Peter spoke. "He's an oul' nagger," he mumbled to no one in particular.

The only one to take any notice of his uncomplimentary remark was Christina, who was piling up the dishes preparatory to carrying them away to be washed. She smiled gratefully at Peter.

Punctually at five o'clock a thick-set, red-faced, middle-aged man, with side-whiskers turning grey, dressed in black, was to be seen coming down 'the loanin'. He bore a serious countenance, for he posed as a particularly religious person, his ambition being to be elected an elder in Kildarragh. He claimed to have been converted in the '59 Revival, when a very young man, "just in the crack of a minute," as he described the wonderful event; and when he realized the change that had passed over him, he took the pipe out of his pocket and ground it beneath his heel, as he had seen other men do. Nevertheless, for all this, he was by no means regarded as a saintly character by the neighbourhood. His "nearness" was proverbial,

and his own old minister of Kildarragh had been heard to say "It is a pity Gideon's pocket has not been converted too."

As was his wont on Sunday afternoon John McBriar, after his substantial dinner followed by an hour's sleep in his chair, was to be found out-of-doors inspecting the premises and with difficulty refraining from putting forth his hand to redress anything he saw amiss. He occasionally employed a foot to set matters right, which could not be regarded as "manual labour" on the Day of Rest.

He was now taking stock of the "hegyard," when he looked up and saw his guest, and hurried to greet him. "Mebbe," he said, by way of entertainment, "you would like to run your eye over the cattle." The visitor intimated that that would be agreeable to him, and his host led the way to the "byre."

"Man, that's a gran' 'Strowberry,'" remarked Gideon.

"Aye, she's all that an' more," said her owner, proudly, "but I have a good mind to part with her, for I'm a bit overstocked at present, an' I have her heifer every bit as good as herself, so I plan to try her in Castleferran Fair a Wednesday week."

"An' thonder's a fine wee Moiley," said the guest.

"Aye, you would be surprised to find what milk she gives, an' the good quality of it."

"I'm sure," Gideon agreeably replied.

The other occupants were commented on favourably, and having exhausted the attractions of the byre, they turned their steps to the pig-stye where a blissful sow surrounded by her round dozen of a family reclined in luxurious ease.

"Man," exclaimed Gideon, enviously, that litter should bring you in a good penny."

Their owner hesitated to be so confident. "It might an' it might not; pork's very risky, an' as far as that goes all farmin's unchancy, but when you're rared to it you just be to make the best of it. But you must be doin' bravely yourself, Gideon, when you're plannin' to buy more lan'."

"Aye, but that's if it wouldn't go to tae high a figure for me but mebbe they would let some of the money stan' out for a while."

He lowered his voice and looked round him. "I'm just goin' to tell you this because you're an old friend, John, but don't be lettin' on to nobody but whiles I'm thinkin' of marryin' again."

His "old friend" pretended to be taken by surprise at this confidence. "You don't mean it, Gideon," he exclaimed; "why you made such a lament when Deborah died that I thought you would never look at another woman again."

"So I did, so I did, to be sure. But the death of your wife is like a dunt on the elbow—very sore at the time, but you soon get over it."

The elder laughed heartily. "Is that what it's like?" he said.

"I'll explain how things are doin' with me at the present," continued Gideon. "Thon housekeeper I have—but they're all of a piece—bids fair to ruin me; the waste I have to stan' and look at is semendable! It's easy come, easy go with her, so I'm studyin' that if I had a good Christian girl with a bit of money or lan' I would be willin' to put her in Deborah's place. Of coorse marriage comes expensive, and courtin', too; but

I wouldn't do much courtin' this time. I mind when I was courtin' Deborah that she inveigled me into takin' her on a Sunday School trip to Warrenpoint. Well it was a wonderful nice place, but it just cost me seven-an'-sixpence of dry money."

"Oh, aye," agreed the elder, "you needn't expect to court or marry without spendin' money. But if you could get a hold of a good woman with fifty poun' or so it would suit you all to pieces."

Gideon felt rather stunned. He knew that the elder had sensed that he was putting out a feeler regarding Christina, and to himself he said, "Is that all he proposes to give, an' him such a full man?" Aloud he said, "I would expect a dale more nor that, for I wouldn't be seen carryin' fifty poun' home!"

At this crisis in their conversation Nellie McBriar appeared opportunely to say shyly that the tea was wet, and they followed her silently indoors.

Tea was laid in "the room," and was of the solid type to be found on the McBriar board. From a "sonsy" Britannia metal tea-pot Mrs. McBriar poured a strong libation, sugared it generously with crystallized sugar and added a rich contribution provided by "Strowberry."

Seated round the table, and a "blessing" having been asked by the elder, the conversation now assumed a complexion more in keeping with the Sacred Day it was than that which had taken place in the farmyard, and turned chiefly on church affairs. The collection for the Foreign Mission, for example, came in for its share of criticism.

"Isn't it lamentable," sighed Gideon, "sendin' such good money entirely out of the country?"

"There's not a doubt about it," warmly agreed his host, "but just on account of our man bein' so much for it, of course I give my shillin' every collection Sunday, but for all the good it does, I might as well spit against the walls of Jericho to knock them down. But Mr. Adair was well lifted this year because it was well on to a poun' up, an' if it does him any good I don't grudge my shilling anyway."

Gideon thought regretfully of his threepenny-bit. "It's a fair imposition on us Christian people," he declared, "for don't the Scriptures say 'Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone.'"

The elder kept smiling to himself for a little, as though lost in some amusing thought. Then he shared it with the company. "I'll tell you my plan for convertin' the Chinese," he said. "I would just convert them with a 'Martini Henry,'" and he laughed jovially at his own witticism.

Mrs. McBriar endeavoured as well as she could to defend the cause. The poor women in heathen countries, she had heard, were just the slaves of the men and couldn't call their souls their own, didn't know, indeed, that they had any. She didn't know how they lived and bore their troubles without the knowledge of a loving Heavenly Father, and having no hope beyond the grave. And Christina, who had been silent till now, said spiritedly, "Mr. Adair's quite right, and if I had any money I would give it to missions."

She had changed her Sunday-go-to-meeting dress, but like Tennyson's Enid, she still looked fair in a somewhat faded lilac cotton. It was with a feeling of intense disgust that she felt the widower's eyes fixed on her time and again while her father was laying down

the law on Church and State. Yet it was not altogether the apple blossom cheeks and the dewy freshness that appealed to the mercenary widower, but the knowledge that those rosy fingers could manipulate butter that brought "the height of the market," and of her ability to milk cows, feed calves, and rear profitable turkeys and geese.

True, she had a lover. All the countryside knew that; —"a young conceit," Gideon called him, helping his brother with whom he lived on the farm—and not much of a farm at that—and earning a little by doing a bit of carpentry here and there. No, he needn't fear Archie McKillop as a rival for the hand of John McBriar's daughter—all he earned went on his back. Of late, however, it was rumoured that there was a more formidable one in the offing—a "strong" farmer far above the commonality with a fine place and said to be wealthy. To be sure he was a widower like himself, and even more elderly. No matter! He knew that the choice of a husband would not rest with Christina, but with her father, a man who for all his hearty ways knew how to rule his household as an elder should.

CHAPTER III.

SUNDAY EVENING AT KILDARRAGH HOUSE

That same Sunday afternoon was dragging its weary length in the pleasant old-fashioned, rather stuffy drawing-room of Kildarragh House, for no window dare be opened in the same room with Henry Gordon's bald head.

He himself sat by the fire in his own armchair, his handkerchief over his head, and believed himself to be reading *The Missionary Herald.* At least he held it in his hands until his eyes closed and, his fingers relaxing their hold, it slid to the floor. Ten minutes later, perhaps, he would pick it up and rustle it, at the same time directing a rather threatening glance at the other occupants of the room which meant to say, "don't presume to think I was sleeping; I was merely resting my eyes."

Alice sat very quietly absorbed in her Sabbath-school lessons, and Jim also was supposed to be engaged in this same meritorious occupation. Eunice sat apart on the low window-seat of the wide front window that looked on the lawn. A neglected book lay on her knee as she watched the drip, drip, drip of the disappointing rain that had followed such a bright morning and looked wistfully down the avenue past the wet shrubs and late Spring flowers to the public road beyond, which was out-of-bounds on the Sabbath Day.

Aunt Matilda dozed frankly in her low favourite chair over "The Life of The Reverend Henry Cooke,

D.D., LL.D." She was intensely interested in Dr. Cooke, for she had known him and he had actually been a guest in that house in her father's time and had preached in Kildarragh. That was on his Homeric pursuit of the heterodox Reverend Henry Montgomery. D.D., from meeting-house to meeting-house in order to vindicate orthodoxy and check the spread of heresy

And what a great man he was! Her mind dwelt on that familiar theme again—so courtly, so eloquent. How strange it was that his own sons were said to be neglectful of Gospel Ordinances. She recalled a story told in connection with that serious shortcoming. Admonishing one of them for not attending public worship, his father said: "Harry, there will be no sermons in hell," to which Harry replied, "Well, it won't be for the want of ministers." Shocking, wasn't it?

She meditated on that problem that had puzzled mankind from the days of Eli, and long before—the delinquencies of the children of the righteous, pondering once again on the fate of her own long lost brothers. One, they were aware, had slept for many years in a foreign grave, and the other? they did not really know if he were alive or dead. And he was the youngest, the one she loved most of her three brothers, and that their mother had loved most, and that, indeed, everybody had loved most.

Taking off her spectacles she wiped her eyes. She could not understand it. We were told the High Priest was too lenient with his sons, but her father was adjudged to have been just the opposite, too unyielding in dealing with his. Only Henry, the eldest, conformed to the strict Gordon pattern. It was perhaps, well,

she reflected, that Henry only had one boy, as yet exemplary. Of course girls were altogether different . . Eunice or Alice could never bring disgrace on the family, and she was thankful for girls. She always concluded her meditations on this painful subject by taking refuge in the comforting thought that in the "Great Day" there would be a solution, and that the prodigals despised here would at last find a place in the loving mother-heart of God.

A welcome sound broke the stillness—the old "Grandfather" in the hall struck five, and Eunice signed to Alice to come and help her to prepare tea, the maids having Sunday evenings free. Another dreary Sunday afternoon was ended!

After tea the capricious April weather took another turn. The sky cleared and the rain ceased, leaving behind it the air cleansed and perfumed. Slipping out into the garden Eunice drank in the moist, sweet atmosphere while restlessly pacing the garden paths till bed-time.

At this time on Sabbath evenings her father was wont to hold an examination on certain books he had provided for his children's instruction and edification on Church History and kindred sacred subjects. She was exempt now, but could still call up trying memories of such classics as *Daubigné's History of the Reformation*, which he placed in the forefront of his list, determining that his children should be so inoculated against the perils of Papacy that they must remain unadulterated Protestants for life. Having recently acquired a newly-published book on the Covenanters—another favourite theme—and to be quite certain that Alice and Jim had read it conscientiously through, he was questioning now

regarding such events as "conventicles," battles, and executions, thus implanting in their tender hearts, as he hoped, a righteous hatred of Claverhouse and all others of that ilk. She was feeling sorry for Alice and Jim.

Someone passing the gate stopped. It was the Reverend Hugh Adair coming back from conducting the evening service in Ednagarvil School-house.

She thought he looked tired and depressed as she gave him her hand through the bars. He held it fast.

No formal greeting passed between them, merely an earnest reproachful look of his steadfast grey eyes that caused hers to fall beneath it as it seemed to search her very soul. She did not ask him to come in, nor did he offer to do so, but she drew her hand away and looked kindly at him.

"How tired looking you are," she said.

"Yes, a little; it's hot."

"Oh! I love the heat," she said, perversely.

He did not notice her remark, did not seem to hear it.

"Eunice," he said abruptly, "I ask you again with all the fervour of my heart to marry me."

"On a Sunday evening," she mocked.

"I believe I have asked you every other day of the week."

"And I have told you every time that it is impossible. I'm not fit to be a minister's wife at all. I was born frivolous."

"I love you as you are," he said simply.

"No, you would regret it very soon. I couldn't attend prayer meetings or have the committee to tea and be agreeable all round."

"You are agreeable as it is, everybody likes you."

"No matter. I feel I have had no life yet. Father is so strict and will not allow me to go to dances or have any amusement at all. And now I am getting quite aged; I was actually twenty-one last week. The best part of my life is flying without anything worth in it. No, I couldn't possibly live to the end of my days in Kildarragh."

He looked very earnestly into her eyes. "Eunice," he said, "promise me anyway that you will do nothing rashly."

Her face flushed, and she looked past him trying not to meet his gaze, seemingly touched by his appeal. But in a moment she had recovered her airiness. "I do everything rashly," she laughed, "and just now I must run in rashly to prayers or father will certainly administer a rebuke. Good-bye."

She was gone. He pushed back the hat from his burning forehead and strode on as if in a dream, his mind absorbed in that dearest vision to him of womanhood—the beautiful, the bewitching Eunice, so kind to everyone but him.

As he neared his manse on the hill, the sun was proclaiming the close of the day, and he was seized by that melancholy that the ending of another day, especially a Sabbath Day imparts. As he looked up at his home he thought one would know it looked void of a dear presence to cheer him as he entered tired and depressed.

Girls—handsome and otherwise—had let him see plainly—too plainly perhaps—how willing they would be to share it with him. Some, no doubt, would have made excellent wives, revelled in meetings, entertained

the committee with gusto, and professed a universal agreeability all round. One alone disclaimed all these qualifications. And oh! the irony of life, she was the one and only mate for him.

"I can see you're just dead beat," greeted his housekeeper, Miss Sarah Sharp; "I'll have your supper in in a minute, and when you take it I'd advise you to go straight to bed."

She returned with his porridge. He was not at any time partial to this dish, but Miss Sharp told him it was good for him. He forced himself to swallow what he hoped would satisfy her, then took up a book and tried to read. Useless! Miss Sharp for the third time presented herself ostensibly to remove the dishes, but actually to pour vinegar on his nitre.

"I wonder, now," she held forth, "if somebody oughtn't to give Mr. Gordon an inkling of the way that Miss Eunice is conductin' herself with that foreign fellow Heskyn, for it's the whole talk of the countryside. They do say she's meetin' him in Castleferran an' here an' there, an' even in her father's fields."

He was not to be drawn on any discussion of the subject, and appeared deeply absorbed in his book. But she knew this was pure pretence. The moment the door closed behind her he threw the book down and began to walk up and down the room. Its four walls stifled him. Stealing out-of-doors as quietly as he could, he seemed to find some alleviation of his feelings by pacing the garden paths.

His housekeeper, on pulling up her blind before getting into bed, gave an exclamation: "Well! if he's not

stravagin in the garden, an' it after eleven o'clock at night. What that senseless girl has to answer for! Mebbe I shouldn't have named it to him again, but I thought he might acquent her father of her behaviour an' get a stop put to it."

Alice was handing round the books for "worship" when Eunice rushed in breathlessly to meet her father's questioning look, which she felt must be answered. "I was talking to Mr. Adair," she defended herself. "He was passing on his way home from Ednagarvil and stopped at the gate."

"And did you not ask him to come in?" demanded her aunt.

"No, not on a Sunday evening," said Eunice mischievously.

"You should certainly have done so," reproved Miss Gordon. "A minister is quite different from an ordinary visitor on the Sabbath."

"Yes," seconded her father, "I very much wish that you had more respect for the ministry, Eunice, and Mr. Adair is specially worthy of it. I have often noticed your habit of making flippant remarks regarding ministers, and I do not think it becoming in an elder's daughter."

Eunice was amused, but succeeded in trying to look penitent.

When worship was ended she went to the kitchen. Bridget, the younger maid, was pleased to act in the rôle of courier and proud to be secretly concerned in an intrigue of this nature. Yes, Bridget had the usual Sunday evening communication. Eunice thanked her,

and took it up to the bedroom she shared with Alice, and sitting on the low window-seat, where the daylight still lingered, she waited till she thought Alice was asleep before reading it. Then she lighted her bedroom candle and perused it smilingly. It was short: "*Meet me same place, same time, to-morrow evening.—L.H.*"

Suddenly Alice spoke across the room: "What are you reading, Eunice?"

"My Bible," laughed Eunice.

"It's a letter. Do you know that someone must have given father a hint about you and that man Heskyn?"

"How do you know?"

"He asked me did I know anything about it."

"And what did you say?"

"I couldn't tell a lie. You know, Eunice, that father and Aunt Matilda have planned that you are to marry Mr. Adair."

"Well, I have planned otherwise. I have planned to leave him for you."

"I am never going to marry. I am going to be a missionary."

"But they are the very ones who do marry; that is what they go out for."

"Oh! Eunice."

"Oh! Alice."

"That Heskyn cannot be a good man; he never goes to church."

"Maybe he goes to chapel."

"And would you marry a man who went to chapel?"

"I'd marry a Mohammedan if I loved him."

"Then I would never speak to you again."

Eunice cut off the conversation. "Good-night, little 'black-mouth,'" she said.

CHAPTER IV.

VISITATION—LOOKING BACK

Hearing the heavy tread of his housekeeper in the hall on the way to the dining-room, the Reverend Hugh Adair hastily arose, having just finished his one o'clock dinner, in an attempt to make his escape before she cornered him. Miss Sharp, however, circumvented him by standing between him and the doorway in order to intimidate him into listening to the latest news of the neighbourhood. To hear and repeat information was to her the elixir of life, and this vital interest in her fellow-creatures had apparently kept her young, for her round, red face was unwrinkled, and there were few silver threads in her raven hair. Their comings and goings, doings and refraining from doing, above all their marrying and giving in marriage—these items were the stimulus her mind craved, and kept it occupied as she washed dishes, swept and dusted. How she acquired such an intimate knowledge of the private affairs of her fellow-men was a deep mystery to her employer. His experience, however, had forced him to admit that she was fairly accurate in her statements as a rule. She stood before him now and held forth.

"They say (her usual preface) that Daniel Harbison's awaitin'-on. I wonder, now, what Martha'll do, for if she promises to marry her cousin William James he's going to leave her the farm; but she's not for doin' it. He's not too handsome (more nor myself), but a good-livin', meetin'-goin' boy, an' that's better than

beauty. And that minds me of Johnnie Sharp's, the carrier's, marriage. He was lookin' for money, an' at last he had come on it; but money and good looks seldom come together, and the girl is or'nary past the common. Johnnie's brother, Willie, didn't happen to see her till after the marriage, an' says he to him—for brothers an' sisters are no way blate with one another. So he says to him, 'Well, Johnnie, you did middlin' well in the money way, but you'll not have much to look at across the fireside.' An' says my brave Johnnie, 'That'll be all right, for I'm not here much of a week-day, an' Sunday soon passes.'"

As the anecdote was apparently concluded, the minister, after smiling as he was expected to do, made an effort to pass, but Miss Sharp had more to communicate, and she started again before he had time to make a move.

"And they say that Orange Bella has taken to her bed and will never be up again. She was a terrible woman for party work. She could keep brave an' sober all the year round, but when it came to near the 'Twelfth' she often took a drop too much an' would be belaurin' up an' down the street. Once she was summoned before Colonel Fitz-High at the Petty Sessions. He fined her a shilling an' costs an' then started to give her a temperance lecture. 'My good woman,' says he, 'I'd advise you to leave the drink entirely alone for it makes you lose control of your tongue and act like a mad woman. You should go to your own minister before the 'Twelfth' and sign the pledge, and that is the best advice I can give you.'" Orange Bella looked up at him an' kept smilin' to herself. 'Thank you, your worship,' she says, 'for your

good words,' and, makin' him a bow, 'but just give me leave to remark, your worship (for she had got a drop), that it's not drinkin' buttermilk that makes your own nose so red!'

"The policeman hustled her out, holdin' one hand over his mouth, but Bella kept laughin' hearty. 'I'll die with the laughin,' she said, 'at the look of the oul' turkey-cock when I gave him the back chat, an' him that hasn't gone to bed sober these forty years. That'll stick in his craw.'"

The minister, though highly amused, tried to make another advance when Miss Sharp exclaimed, and, as one who had kept the best wine to the last, "And what do you think but Gideon Blair is on the 'look-out' again, an' Deborah not much over a year dead . you mind it was your first funeral. Well, I don't begrudge him to whoever gets him, for he's that narrow he would skin a flea for the hide and tallow!"

When he had at last got determinedly past Miss Sharp this time she started to put the few dishes on her tray, then hearing the door slam, she took her stand by the window and watched him from behind the curtain stride down the avenue, and soliloquized: "Dear but he's the fine figure of a man, and as for goodness, he's that good when he's young that I don't know what he'll be when he's old. My heart is sore for him, an' I try to do my best to raise his spirits tellin' him funny wee pieces about this and that, but he hardly seems to hear them. My word! but that girl will suffer for it yet, sooner or later." She sighed, lifted her tray and went kitchenwards.

The Reverend Hugh had already planned to visit Daniel Harbison and Orange Bella, even had his housekeeper not brought this concensus of news under his notice. He was often forced to admit that (especially in cases of sickness) she was a help to him, for a minister is expected to possess prophetic powers concerning its advent, and woe betide him if he fail in his duty to the sick.

It seemed incongruous to associate Death with that magical morning when everything around him was bursting into life. Yet as he passed Gideon Blair's loanin' he reflected that it was just on such another morning that he set out a year ago to pay his last visit to the dying Deborah. He recalled that just as he came to the loanin' Dr. Dodd's "gig" had been emerging from it and the doctor had drawn up when he saw him. "She's dying," the doctor said without any preamble.

"Have you told Gideon?" he had asked.

"I have. She's very near her end."

He had entered and found the wide kitchen, that the tireless hands of the now dying Deborah had kept spotless, deserted, and had gone on into the bedroom beyond, where neighbours were doing what they could in their kindly country way, and her husband stood by the bedside holding her hand. Even as he entered he had sensed the presence of the Angel of Death, and stood reverently to witness the passing. Gideon was bending over the form rigidly stretched under the counterpane and was calling her by name, but there was no response.

"Deborah, Deborah," he was saying, "the doctor says you're bate; now tell me where you would like me to put you?"

Once more the filming eyes opened and rested on

Gideon with a strange far-away expression, as if they had been reluctantly recalled from infinitely grander scenes than those she was now leaving behind for ever, and with what seemed an almost impossible effort she said in a whisper the one word, "Anywhere."

"Now, if you just say the word I'll put you with your own people," urged Gideon.

But Deborah had already passed comprehension of her husband's unusually generous offer at the parting.

"Into Thy hands, O Lord, we commit her spirit," recited the minister solemnly and yet joyfully, for he was aware that Deborah Blair had "thatched her beggin on a dry day."

So Gideon had laid the faithful Deborah gratefully in the Kildarragh Green, devoutly thankful that the extra expense of putting her with her own distant people would not be incurred. But the value of the dead and gone Deborah had daily increased in her husband's estimation when a housekeeper reigned in her stead.

And to-day as he passed Gideon's "full" farmstead this deathbed scene of only one year ago came back to remembrance, partly by the fact his housekeeper had just communicated to him that the heart-broken widower was reported to be "on the look-out" again, and the thought that seized possession of his mind was this—that one of the saddest phases of Life is that we forget Death so soon.

Orange Bella's diminutive cottage glistened white in the sun, its door and windows painted a flaming red. His housekeeper had told him that on one occasion its

mistress had awakened to find her door painted green, and it was said that it did not owe the new coat to those of another Faith. Bella had worked hard all her days and had succeeded in keeping her little home what she called "Protestant looking." Now, past toil, she was granted "poor-relief" and was also aided by the generosity of the "quality" for whom she had been accustomed to work. Major French, whose tenant she had been so long and never behind with her shilling a week rent, now granted her the cottage free to the end of her days.

On knocking Hugh heard a voice from some place within say, "Come on in, whoever you are," and on seeing who her visitor was Bella looked remarkably pleased.

"Your Reverence, you're welcome; just pull over that chair close to me that I'll hear you," causing him to smile, for he rarely got his share in the conversation.

To his enquiry as to how she was, "I'm just hangin' together," she declared; "I'm afeard I'll never more walk on the 'Twelfth,' an' it comin' on. Many's a good 'Twelfth' I seen in my day, an' went always with the drums to the field, for I was always a good Prodestan'."

"You'll have something far better," the minister assured her, "if you are trusting in your Saviour and your sins are forgiven."

"I never did many sins that I mind of," said Bella comfortably; "I never stole a halfpenny in my life, an' I never killed nobody. I might have gone to meetin' mebbe a bit more reg'lar, but never was there an Orange service in the parish church but I was at it, an' if I was at home it was readin' the *Signs of the Times* all about the end of the world comin'. But it hasn't come

yet. There's them, your Reverence—you know who—will get the quare scarr when it does." She laughed and wheezed at the gratifying thought. "My own father was a 'Black man,' so I'm come of good stock, an' I read my Bible well, but there's something in it that I wished wasn't, your Reverence, an' a Catholic man oncest cast it up to me. Sez he, 'There's a epistle to the Romans in your Bible, but none to the Prodestan's,' an' for once I was taken at a disshort how to answer him."

"That," explained the minister, "means an epistle or letter to the Christians living in Rome."

"An' were they good Prodestan's?"

"They were indeed; they just held the simple faith that you and I do."

"But Romans is a bad word, your Reverence, an' it's a pity it's in the Bible at all. Now this woman that tends me is a 'Roman,' an' just wait till you hear what she done on me, an' me givin' her two shillin's a week. You know Mrs. French, the Major's lady? Well, I done their washin' for many's a year an' my clothes were like the driven snow. I used to say to myself, 'You know anyway what you'll be doin' in Heaven; you'll be sent to wash the angels' robes.' Well, Mrs. French brung me a darlin' wee chicken. 'Don't let it boil too long,' sez she, 'for it's young and tendher.' So when Mary Ann come in with my breakfast—but, your Reverence, she never makes my tea strong enough. 'Don't put it in like a pinch of snuff,' I'll shout to her; 'an' let it get a wee scud of a boil.' Now if you notice, it's them that takes weak tea that complains of their narves. Well I never had a narve, thank God! Well, I toul' Mary Ann not to boil the fowl long, an' from

I got my breakfast my mouth kept waterin' for it, an' I kept belawrin, 'Mary Ann, it's done long ago,' for I was just gaspin' for it. 'Don't,' she shouts, 'be in such a tremenjous hurry.' An' I knowed by the thickness of her speech that her mouth was full. At long last in she comes an' sets it down fernenst me with a couple of peeled pirtas. Sez she, 'I'm in a desprit hurry,' an' the next thing I knowed was the door champin' after her."

"I lifted the wee leg next me an' there wasn't much more nor a mouthful on it, an' then I turned it over to get the other, but no matter how long I searched that bird never another leg could I see. So I ate hearty of the rest an' soon fell asleep an' never wakened till Mary Ann was stannin' beside me with my tay. When I gathered my wits, I sez, 'Mary Ann, where's the other leg of the chicken?'"

"'Which one' sez she.

"'The left one,' sez I.

"'In your inside,' sez she, quite imperent.

"'I never set eyes on it,' sez I, 'the bird had only one leg when you brung her to me.'

"'Mebbe it come out of the shell that way, for I mind my mother had one born with three legs,' sez she. "Your Reverence, she's the sort a lie wouldn't choke."

"'No more of your blethers,' Mary Ann,' sez I, 'but away an' bring in the pot an' we'll search for it. So I took the potstick an' she took a spoon, but not the similitude of another leg did we come on.

"'You must have ate it without noticin' it," sez she.

"'Aye, an' swallowed the bone,' sez I. But I just dursnt tell her the truth, for fear she might never come

back. Your Reverence, when she come to me she was as thin as the ribs of your umberrella an' now she's fattenin' like a pig."

When this edifying narrative concluded, the minister felt it rather awkward to offer up the customary prayer. However, when he had done so Bella congratulated him. "Your Reverence, you're the boy can pray," she said. It gratified him to think that she had evidently followed his petition. As he said good-bye she enquired where he was for next.

"To visit Daniel Harbison."

"Aye, I heerd he was awaitin-on, but I never thought a dale of him. He was no Orangeman."

A knock on the closed door caused Martha Harbison to "jump," for she was what the neighbours called "narvish," and was accustomed to callers merely lifting the latch and appearing round the "jamb-wall." Next moment she realized it must be the minister coming to see her uncle.

She welcomed him warmly. "It was only this mornin' that uncle was speakin' of sendin' for you; he knows himself that he's near his end, an' indeed he's far through at the minute." She wiped away the tears that rose to her eyes with a corner of her apron as she led him to a bedroom opening off the kitchen. Here Daniel Harbison lay on a four-poster bed hung with home-woven blue and white homespun, from which he had risen at an early hour, winter and summer, eager for his hard day's work—to plough, to sow, to reap, to fence as each season required—all these occupations

being labours of love, for the farm of his forefathers had taken possession of him and was part of his being.

And now the time had come for him to leave it, while a stranger would plough his fields and cut his corn. It had been hard to believe that this would be. He had persuaded himself that such was inevitable. "I had my day, an' it was a brave long one," he consoled himself, "an' I would go content if I knew there would be a Harbison in the old place when I am undergroun', for it's then that all the wastrels in the country will be swarmin' roun' Martha, like wasps roun' a jampot. I have chased some of them afore now. I'll, of course, leave the place to Martha—it's hers by right—but William James Harbison must share it with her, an' that's what I be to settle afore I go." The dying man's thoughts kept going round and round in this way as Martha announced, "Here's Mister Adair to see you, uncle."

"Who?" He was very deaf and his sight uncertain.

"Mr. Adair."

"God bless him!"

Martha placed a chair by the bedside while the minister clasped the horny hand lying on the coverlet that told its own tale, and recognised from the greyish face that the end was not far off. The beard from which he had got the name in the countryside of "Goatee" Harbison rose and fell on his breast by reason of his laboured breathing.

"I'm mortyal bad, I'm mortyal bad," he gasped in response to the minister's enquiry, and to his niece he commanded: "Away you go, an' close the door after you."

When Martha had obeyed (only to stand behind it listening) Daniel began in a weak voice: "I want you to make my will I'm leavin' the place to Martha . . I r'ared her, for she was left an orphan, an' we had no children of our own . . . She's a good wee girl, an' her father was a terrible religious man . . stricken he was in the Revival they made him an elder in Kildarragh, but he didn't live long after it."

The old man rambled on of long bygone events, most of which the listener could not catch, when suddenly he seemed to recall his mind to the present hour and make a supreme effort to try and accomplish what he considered the last duty of his life.

"It's who Martha's goin' to marry that's botherin' me plenty'll want her for the good sittin'-down but I couldn't rest in my grave if I thought there wasn't a Harbison in the place six generations of Harbisons . . . six generations of Harbisons . . William James must surely come after me or I'll not die happy . he's my first cousin an' come of the old stock . many's the time I've advised her about marryin' him but she's stubborn, like all the Harbisons, an' she'll take no admoneetion."

The minister, who had the greatest difficulty in making out these confidences, was now surprised to hear him raise his voice and call, "Hoy, Martha," and on her appearing commanded her to bring pen and paper. Martha returned and placed them on the table beside the bed, on which lay the old man's Bible and spectacles. She then resumed her position behind the closed door. The dying man tried to rally again. "Put down," he said, "that the place is to go to Martha if she marries William James Harbison."

The minister hesitated. "It would be better if you asked her to do that herself," he shouted into Daniel's ear.

"Well, I'll give her one more chancst if you bring her in."

Martha entered shyly, her pretty pale face flushed and her eyes cast down, for, as she afterwards confessed to Ann Twigg, who stayed at night with her, she was "that shamed before the minister."

Daniel looked searchingly at her. "Are you goin' to marry William James?" he demanded.

"I don't know," she murmured.

"What? Spake up."

"Your uncle wishes it," said the minister.

"I don't be thinkin' of marryin' at all."

"What?"

"She says she isn't thinking of marrying at all," interpreted the minister.

"An' who would work the lan'?"

"I could mebbe hire a man."

"She says she could employ a man," conveyed the minister. For Martha, who always before could make her uncle hear, seemed to have lost her voice in the extremity.

"Aye, an' end in ruination," said her uncle angrily.

A fit of coughing followed, and Daniel lay back so exhausted that Hugh was afraid that the excitement of settling his affairs had hastened his end.

But suddenly his eyes opened, he seemed to make an effort to summon up his remaining strength and, pointing his finger threateningly at Martha, gasped, "if you marry anybody else I'll ha'nt you." His voice rose

almost to a scream, and his head that he had tried to raise fell back on the pillow.

After waiting a little till Daniel had recovered somewhat, the minister bent over him and offered up a prayer punctuated by Martha's sobs, after which Daniel seemed to be revived both in body and mind. "I'm ready to depart now," he said audibly; "I walked with God in the fields I saw Him in everything I know Him, an' He knows me, an' it'll only be like meetin' an old friend."

The minister rejoiced to hear this dying testimony. Daniel had been an unusually silent man all his life. It took approaching death to unlock his lips and reveal the inner man.

Hugh made the short will (without any reference to William James) and sent Martha out to find two neighbours to witness it, while he stayed with the dying man. When they returned Daniel was unable to write his name. The minister had to guide his hand to make a cross.

There was no lack of kind neighbours to offer to sit up with Martha and Ann. Just at the hour when Daniel was accustomed to rise so willingly for his long day's work his spirit went forth to seek whatever mode of service was appointed him in unknown regions. A Heaven of idleness could hold no happiness for such as he.

At the simple funeral William James Harbison was chief mourner, and in the lonely evenings that followed in the so strangely empty house, he came to sit with Martha and Ann and constituted himself the friend and adviser of the farm's new mistress. But when he hinted at any closer relationship he received scant en-

couragement. Occasionally Ann Twigg attempted to put in a good word for him, and got no thanks from Martha.

"There's plenty would jump at him," Ann would say.

"Let them," Martha would retort; "but I'm young yet an' I'll bide my time."

"Many's a one did that an' missed their market."

"No fear of that. Twenty acres of good lan' would get you a husband if you hadn't a tooth in your head."

"But, Martha, your uncle with nearly his last breath said that if you didn't take William James he would ha'nt you."

"I wouldn't care; if I want a man I'll pick him myself," Martha would say with fine bravado.

"Well, you're of a narvish turn an' can't be left your lone at night—hardly even in the daytime; but I'll continue to stay with you at night a while anyway yet—that's if nothin' miraculous happens."

CHAPTER V.

EUNICE'S MEETING WITH HESKYN.

It seemed now to Eunice Gordon that she had known Lawrence Heskyn for a long time, but in fact not a great many weeks had passed since she first set eyes on him. This was how the acquaintance began.

Accompanying her aunt on a shopping expedition to Castleferran she, there of all places in that dull country town, experienced quite a romantic adventure. This pleasing and unexpected episode she believed had brought excitement and happiness into what she considered her former hum-drum existence.

Leaving Miss Gordon, who avoided all unnecessary exercise, in the "Emporium," she went up the rather steep hill to the Post Office to transact some business for her father there, and was turning to leave when a voice behind her—not a Castleferran voice—said, "I think this is your property which you have left on the counter," and a tall and handsome young man held out to her her bag, while with the other hand he raised his hat. Truth is she had noticed him while counting her stamps and wondered who he might be. Lost in these reflections she had failed to pick up her belonging.

"Oh! thank you," she said as she received it, "that was very stupid of me."

"Only slightly forgetful."

Next thing she knew he was walking by her side down the hill.

"Isn't it a wonderful evening for so early in the

year?" he remarked, pleasantly. And she did indeed consider it wonderful. Of course she knew that she should not be encouraging a strange young man to make conversation or to escort her, but he had been so kind about the bag that she must at least be civil to him. So she easily persuaded herself.

"You seem to be a stranger here," she said, "and I'm afraid you don't find us very advanced."

"This place is a bit stuffy, I must say; I'm from Dublin myself."

"And you are touring the 'Black North'?" she queried.

"Some things in the North I find quite charming."

"Yes," she agreed, we have some very fine scenery."

"I don't really know much about that. You see, I have not been here very long and have been kept busy since I came. I am an engineer working on the new line of railway from Castleferran to Hightown. But I don't expect to be here very long, and hope to be able to endure it till my time is up."

"I have to live here all the year round except a month in the summer at Portrush."

"You live here, then?"

"About two miles from this, at a place called Kildarragh. There is not much there but a meeting-house."

"That doesn't sound too lively an asset, I should say."

"On the contrary, it is the centre of all our interests and entertainments."

"I should like very much to see that gay spot."

"The church is open every Sunday morning at twelve o'clock."

He shrugged his shoulders "Rather early for me after my hard week's work."

They had now got almost the length of the "Emporium," and Eunice was beginning to get a little frightened. Suppose her aunt should appear at its door looking for her? What a situation! Fortunately they were on the far side of the street, and Miss Gordon was short-sighted. Eunice could imagine she heard her say "Who was that, Eunice, with whom you were walking? Was it Mr. Newcome" (Mr. Newcome was the minister of 1st Castleferran) "or was it Mr. McMaw?" (Mr. McMaw was the minister of 2nd Castleferran.) She smiled to herself. No, it was neither of these worthies, but someone infinitely more fascinating than any cleric—at least to her, yet probably anathema to Aunt Matilda. She said hastily: "I am going into this shop, where my aunt is waiting for me, and I see Patrick with the horse and car at the door."

"I am sorry, but perhaps we shall meet again in Castleferran, Miss—er—I'm afraid I haven't the pleasure of knowing your name."

"Miss Gordon."

"Do you come often into Castleferran, Miss Gordon?"

"Fairly often; you see it is our nearest town for shopping."

"I usually stroll down the street on Saturday afternoons, for I am free then."

"I must really go, Mr.—er—I'm afraid I don't know your name."

"Lawrence Heskyn."

"Good evening, Mr. Heskyn."

He took off his hat with a fine flourish as Eunice

crossed the street and disappeared into the dark shop.

"Have you finished, Aunt Matilda?"

"Quite. Tell Patrick to come in for my parcels."

From a distance the new acquaintance watched the remarkably pretty girl assist the stout, elderly lady to mount the jaunting car, then spring up lightly herself on the other side, and the car turn the corner into what he supposed was the Kildarragh road.

The very next Saturday as the Gordon family sat at dinner, Eunice announced her intention of walking to Castleferran for the purpose of buying a new summer hat.

"But could you choose one by yourself, Eunice?" remonstrated her aunt. "What a pity you didn't think of it that last day we were in. Alice couldn't go with you, for it is her music lesson afternoon, and I couldn't either, for Patrick is taking your father to Hightown on business.

"I have always chosen my own hats, no matter who was with me. I know just what I want—a broad leghorn straw with a wreath of pink rosebuds."

"It sounds rather gay. A little bunch of rosebuds, now, at one side, and a bow of black velvet ribbon would be more genteel; but you always do what you like yourself and resent any advice. I hope this wilful trait in your character will not yet lead you into any awkward situation," Miss Gordon sighed forebodingly.

With a light heart that revealed itself in her light step and airy carriage, Eunice set out on her walk, hardly feeling the ground underneath her feet as she swung along. Here and there late primroses peeped

out at her from the mossy banks, the lambs skipped in the fields, and the hedges were preparing to burst into their green Summer attire. Everything around her heralded a prospect of even more wonderful days coming.

Eunice felt in spirit at one with Nature on her re-awakening, plucked a posy of primroses and violets and pinned it on her jacket, saying to herself as she did so: "To-day it is just Heaven to be alive." Her presentiment was justified. Never had she enjoyed such an afternoon in her life.

Firstly she choose her hat with its perfect accompaniment of pink roses in the "Emporium," leaving it to be trimmed while she took a walk up the hilly street, stopping often to look in at the shop windows, where everything displayed seemed to interest her.

On coming to the top, she crossed over and sauntered slowly down the other side, pretending when half-way down to be quite surprised to encounter the Dublin gentleman of such brief acquaintance. She would just pass him with a bow and perhaps a smile—and Eunice's smiles were enchanting as moonbeams. Evidently this particular one was encouraging, for he stopped and raised his hat very high.

"Excuse me, Miss Gordon," he apologised, "but you cannot realize the pleasure it is to meet an apparition like you in Castleferran street."

"You speak as if I were a being from some other world."

"You must be, for you haven't the dour Castleferran countenance. May I turn and walk part of the way with you?"

"If you wish. I am now going home, but must first call at the 'Emporium' for a parcel. It may not be ready for a little while yet."

They walked down the hill together and then up again and out into the country road a little way, he doing most of the talking. Eunice thought his voice like music compared with the harsh tones to which she was accustomed. It was some time before they got back the length of the "Emporium."

"Now I must really say good-bye, Mr. Heskyn," she said, as they reached the shop door.

"Aren't you coming out at all again?" he asked.

"Oh! yes, but it may be some time."

"I'll wait."

And when she appeared carrying her paper bag he was still there, and insisted on being allowed to carry it for her. She told him laughingly that it contained a new hat and everybody would know what it was, and it would look foolish to see a man carrying it.

"You will at least allow me to walk part of the way with you, for I am at a dead end when not working."

They soon left Castleferran far behind, and still he walked by her side. One or two Kildarragh folk whom they met, Eunice thought, looked questioningly at them, and even reprovingly. "If I should meet the Reverend Hugh now," she wondered, "what on earth would I do; but I'm safe, I think, for he is busy in his study preparing to-morrow's sermon—or ought to be."

And how her new friend talked! How charmingly he talked! She discovered with a start that they were already nearing home, and she must certainly dismiss him immediately or something dreadful might occur, such as encountering her father, or even Alice.

"But I must really see you again," he urged. "I'll come the length of this lane to-morrow evening about eight o'clock and we could meet again and have another chat. I have enjoyed this one, I assure you."

"To-morrow will be Sunday," she reminded him.

"The better day the better deed."

"But you don't understand how strictly Sunday is kept here. I dare not go outside the gate."

"Fearful!"

"Oh! no. We have been brought up to it. Father is an elder, and strict even for that."

"What exactly does an 'elder' signify?"

Eunice found some difficulty in defining the exalted office. "It means a specially good man that the congregation choose to help the minister—one who can pray."

"Might I call to see your father, and perhaps imbibe a little of this excellence?"

"Oh! please, no," Eunice said, alarmed, "he would ask you what church you worshipped in and things like that."

He seemed very much amused. "I see you think I would not pass the examination," he said; "but if Sunday is such a day of penance, what about Monday?"

She hesitated and was, of course, lost. "If I can manage it I may; but don't be disappointed if I don't come."

"Indeed I would be desolated," he told her. "What time?"

"After seven, perhaps. Father usually reads for an hour or two after tea."

"Splendid! See that he has a good thriller."

"He wouldn't read a novel, or allow me to, either, if he knew."

"But you do it all the same?"

"Sometimes," she confessed.

She said good-bye hurriedly, leaving him standing, hat in hand, ran up the lane and in by the back gate.

They were just finishing tea. "You stayed a very long time in Castleferran," greeted her aunt.

"I waited to get my hat trimmed."

"It's a long walk both ways, and you must be very tired," said Aunt Matilda, handing her a cup of rather cold tea. But Eunice scarcely noticed how it tasted.

"The pancakes were lovely when they were hot, but I'm afraid they are a little tough now."

"They are quite nice still," said Eunice before tasting one.

She did, indeed, think everything good that evening, though she had difficulty in taking such a meal as was expected of one who had walked to Castleferran and back.

"I must show you my new hat," she said, rising when she could not possibly eat a morsel more.

"You are too excited about that hat to take your tea properly, I see," adjudged her aunt.

Eunice laughed, and ran lightly upstairs for the wonderful hat.

CHAPTER VI.

GIDEON BLAIR PRAYS

Coming in from "fotherin" his cattle for the night, and assuring himself that all was safe about his farmstead, Gideon Blair found the kitchen empty, his housekeeper having retired for the night.

The only welcome awaiting him came from a still too lively fire on the hearth, at which he scowled. "The clock warnin' for nine," he muttered, "and a fire you could cook a dinner at." Seizing the tongs, he conveyed the greater part of the surplus fuel to the bucket near by. "This woman will have me in the poorhouse, without a doubt, before all's over. I can thole her no longer, and I see plain that I be to marry again. Thus was his conclusion of the whole situation.

Sitting heavily down on one of the rush kitchen chairs he gave himself up to desperate thinking, his mind running back and forth over the females of his acquaintance, their merits and demerits; but he found himself unable to come to any decision as to which one was best fitted to fill the important position he proposed to confer on her.

Suddenly he was conscious of a brain-wave. He would not settle the matter himself, but would commit the outcome to Higher Powers as befitted a converted man. He would go down on his knees and beseech Divine guidance in the ultimate choice.

"I mind," he reflected, "that I prayed strong about it the first time, and my prayers were answered sure

enough, for I was sent the best of a well-doin' woman, one that did not waste my substance. This time I'll go further still and follow the Scriptural example of casting lots. I'll do it this very night, should I sit up till eleven o'clock!"

He then planned the proceeding thus. He would write the names of certain females on slips of paper, drop them into his hat, engage in fervent prayer, after which he would draw out with entire confidence the Heaven-appointed wife for him.

Taking off his muddy boots, he went "up the house," returning with his Sunday hat in hand, while from the high mantel-shelf he procured a stump of pencil. With some more difficulty he found a piece of blank paper, and with all these requirements for the ritual before him on the kitchen table he sat down again and thought harder than ever.

First to mind came the Widow Todd, of whose husband's will he had been the executor and therefore knew its contents. The farm went to his son, who in his turn was required to pay his mother ten pounds a year for life. It wasn't a great fortune, so to speak, but it would at least feed her—and then he wondered would it? He had disturbing thoughts regarding her economy. "I hear tell," he recalled, "that she would put three or mebbe four eggs in the bakin' of one cake." But he would reason her out of baking any cakes—a prodigal practice, in his opinion. She ruled poor feckless Jacob Todd completely, but she wouldn't do that with him. Cutting the paper into slips, he wrote on one "Mary Todd," and consigned it unhesitatingly to the depths of the hat.

Now, who next?

There was Miss McGeorge, who considered herself superior to the commonality—poor and proud she was—yet she possessed a nice little cottage and garden and the grazing of a cow, the latter seeming to be her chief means of support. She could at all times present a respectable, nay, superior appearance to the world, and that showed that she was a good manager. He would let the cottage and bit of land advantageously, and she could bring the cow with her. She considered herself a lady, and the question was would she take him, full place and all as he had, and money past him? There was, he reflected, no knowing what a woman would do till she was put to the test. She was like himself, not too young, and this might be her last chance, if, indeed, she had got any before, for Gideon, like most men, believed no woman remained single from choice. It would do no harm anyway to try her. He dropped Miss McGeorge with assumed bravery beside the Widow Todd.

Dare he aspire? Christina McBriar, young, beautiful, a fine housekeeper, who, as all the countryside knew, had a devoted lover disapproved of by her father, and latterly, report said, an elderly one with a gentleman's place almost, and plenty of money, who would, he was certain, be approved by her father. No matter! He would put her in anyway. Martha Harbison's name also occurred to him. He had heard that the uncle, who had reared her and was now dying, was going to leave her the farm only on condition she married her cousin, William James Harbison. Also she was considered rather delicate, and that wouldn't suit him at all. He dismissed Martha absolutely from the select company in the hat.

And lastly there remained Susan Stacey—sweet Susan Stacey—who (so he flattered himself) had nearly been the first Mrs. Gideon Blair. Alas! She had one serious disqualification—she was penniless. After the death of her father she had lived on in the old home very happy keeping house for her brother Thomas. Unexpectedly Thomas had married a shrewish woman, and from then Susan's life must have been a hard one, although she would not admit it. Everyone pitied Susan except herself—a drudge in the old home, who refused to be unhappy, nursed and loved the children as they came, patched and darned for them, and held them, after her brother, the dearest object of her life. Also any neighbour could certainly count on Susan's wholehearted help in case of emergency. Above all else her affection for Kildarragh Meeting-house, where her father had been an elder, was unbounded. Was not Sunday compensation for any unpleasantness of the previous week? To pour out her soul, filled with love and gratitude in praise, was the chief joy of her life, for Susan possessed a remarkable voice that, had it been trained, would have attracted widespread attention.

Twenty years ago, when Susan was still in her 'teens, and Gideon slightly more romantic than he was now, his heart beat faster on seeing her coming towards him on the road, or in listening to her voice in "meeting." One special occasion still stood out after all these years in his memory.

It was harvest-time, and he was giving Amos Stacey "a hand" with the corn, when Susan came out to the field carrying their tea. She was wearing a pink cotton dress, and in her thick coils of yellow hair—the very colour of the corn that they were putting in "stooks"

—she had stuck a bunch of rowan berries from the tree at the gate as she passed through. And now, after all these long years of contented marriage with Deborah, and hard work from dawn to dusk to accumulate "filthy lucre," he now realized that his desire was to marry Susan above any other woman he knew. And, of course, in her case there would be no doubt as to the response. Why, she would be unspeakably gratified for such unforseen fortune to come her way. He would certainly include Susan, and that would show it was not altogether money he was bent on. So he felt quite virtuous as he wrote Susan Stacey and dropped the paper among the others.

Mixing the slips carefully, he placed the hat on the table and knelt reverently beside it on the tiles. But scarcely had he concluded the prolonged "O" which prefaced all Gideon's prayers when an alarming crash from the direction of the pantry caused him to jump to his feet rather irreverently, exclaiming, "It's that villain of a cat!" Liza Ann must have left the pantry door unlatched! This was, to him, another warning demanding the dismissal of the unsatisfactory Liza Ann. He must, however, at once evict the marauder, who should very well know by this time that she was not tolerated indoors at all, for countless times had she been chased for her life with uncomplimentary epithets hurled at her tail. But cats were full of assurance—you couldn't affront them—and only that she filled the necessary position of vermin killer to the establishment, in return for which she got a moiety of food, and was expected to find anything more required by her own efforts, she would not be harboured about Gideon's frugal homestead.

Lighting a candle and shading it with one hand he sought the pantry, and at the spectacle of a puddle of cream on the floor beside a broken bowl his blood boiled over, so that he felt he could there and then choke the perpetrator of such a wanton act—that is if he could catch her. She was certainly more agile than he, and dashing between his legs ran up a stairway that led from the kitchen to a sort of loft where was housed a collection of antiques—old pasteboard boxes, outworn garments of varying periods, chairs with three legs, a bedstead that retained only two legs, and other articles of a like decrepit kind, too numerous to mention, all of which should have undergone honourable cremation three or four decades ago. This store-room had time and again proved a delectable "city of refuge" for pussy when pressed. Unfortunately Gideon, excited by the chase, forgot the low lintel until his head reminded him of it, maddening him on to more furious pursuit, and his temper infuriated by the thought that the cat was actually enjoying herself. At last she made in the direction of the door. Stooping to seize her by the scruff of the neck, the candle fell from his hand extinguishing itself, and pussy tripped lightly down the stairs—as usual she had won the day.

Gideon followed slowly, took out his purse and applied a penny to his forehead for a few minutes. Then he knelt once more, in considerably less prayerful frame of mind.

Another interruption!

Scarcely had his lips formed themselves into the necessary "O" when a knock came to the door, which Gideon had taken the precaution to bar. With a martyr's sigh he rose to open it.

"Well, Gideon," said the late-comer heartily—who proved to be Samuel Nethercote, a farmer living most of a mile away—"I was just passin' an' noticed your light burnin' so late. I thought there might be something wrong with the animals, mebbe. But I see you're makin' preparation to go some place, for you have your good hat on the table."

"No," Gideon got out slowly, for he was somewhat at a loss to account for its presence. It occurred to him to say that he had only taken it out to brush it, but even in his ruffled state of mind he recognized that the suggestion came straight from "the father of lies" —one of Gideon's favourite titles of the evil one. So he just feebly repeated, "No, I'm not."

"It's too late to sit down," said the visitor, seating himself.

"Not at all," said Gideon, evidently failing to detect "the adversary's" prompting this time.

"Now that I see your hat so handy, I have a mind to try it on, for I'm in a notion of buyin' a new one, an' I fancy the shape of it would become me." He reached out his hand for it, but Gideon seized it first.

"Aye, to be sure, try it on and welcome," urged Gideon, hastily transferring its contents almost as skilfully as a conjurer into the hollow of his hand. The visitor placed it on his head.

"It becomes you quare an' well; just a notion on the big side. A size less would do you," suggested Gideon.

"To tell you the truth," said Samuel, lowering his voice and drawing his chair nearer Gideon, "between you an' me as old friends—but not a word to nobody—I've a big notion of gettin' married."

Gideon had difficulty in refraining from uttering his first reaction to this confidence, which was, "well, it's near time." Instead he substituted bluntly: "Who's the woman?"

"Well, I haven't just asked her outright yet, but keep givin' her hints; you see, it is this way with me—my mother is hardly fit to wrastle with a servant-girl any longer. She always enjoyed poor health an' never was fit for the work of a house, an' I feel that it's now my duty to marry an' bring home a good woman that will take all trouble off her hands."

"Aye," agreed Gideon, "Mrs. Nethercote never wrought too hard as long as I mind" (while to himself he confided, "Dear help any man that gets the like of her for a wife").

"I'm just goin' to tell you, Gideon, that I have studied the situation over an' over again, an' the most suitable woman to fill the place is Susan Stacey. Many's a time I wondered why she wasn't picked up long ago, for she's a good Christian girl an' a fine worker—but of course I know she couldn't even bring a cow with her, let alone a fortune."

"A virtuous woman is better than rubies," quoted Gideon, for he had got something of a shock and for a minute didn't know what to say, but when his own volubility failed he had resort to Scripture.

"Of course there's others might do if I looked round—Mrs. Todd, now, is a fresh woman still, but I'm not partial to widows; besides, she kept poor Jacob under her thumb. She's a bit of a heeler, an' her an' my mother mightn't do under one roof."

"What about Miss McGeorge?" suggested Gideon. "I mind hearin' you sayin' that you admired her."

"So I did, at a time, but never could make so free with her as to let her see it. Just because she had an uncle a minister she puts on great airs; but we had a minister in our family, too, I could tell her."

"I never heard of him afore."

"Mebbe not, for I never was given to boastin', but him an' my grandmother were full cousins."

"What sort of a preacher was he?"

"He was a tremenjous speaker an' had a power of words. He could get up in any public meeting an' tear away till they would have to pluck his tails to stop that somebody else would get a chance to speak. His people used to brag that there wasn't a text from beginnin' to end of the Bible but he could preach a sermon on. There was an ungodly youth said once that he could give him one that would puzzle him, an' the text was '*Take it by the tail.*' This story come to his ears, an' one Sabbath Day didn't he announce: 'My brethren, you will find my text to-day in the '—I forget what chapter of the book, of wherever it is—'*Take it by the tail.*' Well, not many got a wink that day! All the sins an' shortcomin's mankind is heir to he showed up, an' after a sermon on each of them he would shout: 'My beloved brethren, if you are partial to this sin, take it by the tail.' An' the last head—for he had a brave lot, I disremember how many—was the oul' boy himself. An' after callin' him all the names in the Scriptures an' out of them that would make the hair stan' on your head with the description he gave of him, sez he, 'My beloved brethren, it's him—callin' him more names—that tempts you to any an' all of the aforesaid sins I have mentioned, but have not had time to enlarge on, but the next time he tries his wiles on

you just—an' then he raised his voice—'take *him* by the tail'—an' then he shouted that you would have heard him down at the gate—'*an' give it a good twist.*' Then he spoke low again, 'An' now may the Lord add His blessing to the preaching of His Word.' Then he sat down an' takes out his handkerchief an' wipes the sweat off his face an' neck."

"That was an uncommon fine discourse, sure enough," Gideon gave his opinion, "but why did you never tell Miss McGeorge that whole piece?"

"Because she never gave me the chancst." Samuel paused and was silent for a few minutes, then he resumed: "I'm just goin' to tell you this, Gideon (private, mind!), of an advance I *did* make to her. I summoned up my courage one summer evenin' to visit her an' see how the lan' lay. Well, when she opened the door an' saw who it was, she gave me a look was as good as a summons, I can tell you. But she asked me in, for she prides herself on her manners. I sat down on the first chair I came to an' tried to explain my visit. To this day I don't know how I invented the story. I believe I must have inherited a bit of the cleverness of the old minister himself. I begins like this:

"'I was just passin',' Miss McGeorge, an' stopped to admire your pianos that you have fernenst the door, an' I wondered would you think it a liberty if I asked you for to give my mother a root of them, you know she's mortyal fond of flowers.'

"'I'll be happy to give Mrs. Nethercote a root when they go out of bloom,' says she. 'I hope she's well.'

"'Just middlin,' sez I 'I can see she's failing' an' hardly fit to look after the house—of coorse she always kept a servant'—I just said that to let her see we were

as good as she was. Then I went on boldly: 'I have come to think that I should marry an' bring someone in that would be a help an' comfort to her.'

"Sez she, in a voice like ice: 'You should have done that when you were young, Mr. Nethercote.'

"That was a slap in the face for me, you may say, an' to hide my affront I got up, pretendin' to look at a big picture that was over the mantelpiece. It showed a long table with men sittin' at it (but not of our day, I could tell from their clothes), an' underneath it what do you think was printed—*The Diet of Worms.*

"When I read that my stomach nearly turned, an' sez I, 'What brought them to eat worms; was there a famine in the land, or what?'

"I declare to you, Gideon, she looked at me as if I was as ignorant as a pig. 'That engraving' (that's what she called it), 'was left to me by my uncle, the Reverend Moses McGeorge, who prized it highly. It represents,' she went on—but, indeed, I couldn't tell you half of what she went over about Luther an' the Pope an' them ones. 'A "Diet," sez she, means an assembly to discuss doctrinal questions, and Worms was the name of the city where they met.' Man! Gideon, she can han'le her tongue like a counsellor. So when she had finished, an' I foun' that I was comin' no speed in the courtin' line, I turned to go.

"'When the 'peenies' (that's what she called the pianos) 'go out of bloom I'll not forget to send Mrs. Nethercote a root,' she said, not askin' me to stay any longer. 'I'd be obliged to you,' sez I, holdin' out my hand. She touched it that gingerly that you would have thought I had the leprosy, an' she very near champed the door on my heels.'"

"She's an impotent piece, that's what she is," pronounced Gideon, and fervently hoped he would not seize her in the "draw."

"But I say, Gideon, would that be your weddin' hat?" enquired the visitor.

At this query Gideon sighed heavily.

"It is not, then—but I could tell you a strange story about my weddin' one. It was stole from me, an' where do you think, now? but at a Ordination!"

"Boys-a-boys," exclaimed Samuel; "wouldn't you think that would be a safe place, an' so many ministers about?"

"I don't blame them, for they would only fancy a 'kester'."

"Would it be an elder, then, that you suspect?"

"I wouldn't just say. Some of them elders, right enough, doesn't adorn their sacred office. Anyway it happened at the Reverend McAnuff's Ordination in Killyclabber. I thought I would give myself a day's outin's an' that it would cost me nothin'. But it cost me dear in the end, an' that was the last Ordination I went to in a foreign meetin'-house."

"Had you not it in the seat with you?"

Gideon sighed again. "That's just where I made the mistake. There was a row of pegs in the hall an' people hangin' up their hats on them, an' I thought mebbe there'll be a crowd inside an' it might get crushed, so I hung it up on one of the pegs, an' took a note of the peg—an' that was the last I ever seen of it in this world! When the proceedin's were over—an' brave long ones they were—I stepped out an' thought I had nothin' to do but put my hand on my good hat—an' the sight nearly left my eyes, for hangin' on the

very same peg was an oul' strow hat with part of the brim hangin' off it. So I found the sexton, an' together we searched high an' low—even the gallery an' the Session-room, an' every mortyal place, but couldn't find a vestige of it. Sez the sexton, sez he, 'You just be to go home in that strow one, an' mebbe I could put a pin in the brim that it wouldn't go into your eye an' blind you on the road.'"

"'Ketch me,' sez I, 'travellin' the public road in that kuriosity; why I give you my word I wouldn't be seen comin' out of the flax-hole in it. But I'll leave you my address, and if somebody's conscience smites them sen' me word at once.'

"So back home I walked, bareheaded, lookin' like some tramp that had never heard the Gospel, an' when I turned into my own loanin' Deborah was standin' at the door watchin' for me, an' she shouted, 'Why, what has come on your hat, Gideon? Did it blow away?'

"I mebbe wasn't in the best of a temper after meetin' with the loss, an' was a bit short. 'Why, woman, have you took leave of your senses? Blew away!' I sez, 'an' not as much wind as would stir a leaf on a sally tree. It was stole from me at the Ordination!' At that she raises her both hands, an' sez she, 'Why, what on earth is the world comin' to? An' at Ordination! Them that done such a thing should be sessioned!'

"So the upshot of it all was that I had to go in to Castleferran before the next Sabbath Day an' buy the hat you're lookin' at. Now I got it in Wallace's, an' he said it was a four-an'-sixpenny one, but I beat him down to four shillin's."

Samuel, who had kept shaking his head sympathetically during this touching narrative, now rose to

go. "Not a breath, now, Gideon, to nobody, Gideon," he warned; "but I've taken a quare sudden notion to Susan Stacey, an' I'll let you know how I'm progressin' later on."

Gideon gladly opened the door for him, and the cat now took this delayed opportunity to make her escape. "Peace be after the both of you," muttered Gideon, viciously, as he closed it and re-barred it.

For the third time Gideon fell on his knees and prayed: "O Lord, I beseech Thee to give me Thy guidance in this serious step I am about to take. Hold my hand when it goes into the hat, an' direct me to take out the right woman—a well-doin' woman, too—as Thou didst before one who will not waste my substance and whose price will, indeed, be beyond rubies; if she brings money or lan,' well an' good, but if not, Thy will be done."

He closed his eyes more tightly, groped among the slips of paper, drew one out, opened his eyes and read *Susan Stacey.*

After such a certain answer to his petitions, he told himself that he must have no regrets that he failed to draw any of the better dowered candidates, and kept persuading himself of his entire satisfaction with the inspired plan he had taken. "In the first place," he said, "I like her, an' that's a great thing in marriage. It wasn't the Lord's will that she was to be the first, but I know now that it is His will that she should be my second. I know, too, that there's a work of grace in her heart an' that she'll not waste my goods. I'm thankful now that it wasn't Mary Todd; her ten poun'

a year would hardly cover her profligacy, an' as to 'Lady McGeorge'" (as he called her), she had affronted Samuel Nethercote, a 'full' man who kept a servant girl to do the work—well he wouldn't risk any affront from her now. Although he had put Christina McBriar's name in the hat, he knew he would have little chance of acquiring such a matrimonial prize as she would be.

He felt much relieved that the difficult business was settled, and resolved to commence his courtship of Susan right away so as to forestall Samuel Nethercote. Next Sabbath evening he would attend the service at Ednagarvil, where she raised the singing. He would then leave her home and would drop a hint of something that would prepare her for a formal proposal later on.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SERVICE IN EDNAGARVIL SCHOOL-HOUSE.

It was the Sabbath evening of the Reverend Jeremy Sturrock's appointed turn to take the service in Ednagarvil School-house—an outpost of the Castleferran Presbytery on which four or five congregations fringed, and he set out to undertake this duty in the vigorous manner in which he did everything from lacing his boots to preaching the Gospel.

It meant a walk—mostly uphill—of three Irish miles, but he was not the man to count the cost. His tall spare figure and swinging gait were a familiar sight on the roads around, and even at distances from, his congregation of Ballydeuteronomy. The aggregate number of miles he had traversed on foot during his thirty-five years' ministry there could scarcely be credited, yet he strode along showing no symptoms of fatigue, his "kester" pushed back on his head and his coat thrown open to the mild Spring breeze, displaying an expanse of white starched front surmounted by a white *cravat* said to be the largest in the presbytery.

Summer was perceptibly in the air that evening, and the unaccustomed warmth caused him now and then to wipe his brow where the hard hat had left its mark.

There had been a light shower that intensified the fragrance of the wallflowers around cottage doors, mixing their odours with the pleasant pungent tang of turf smoke making its exit over half-doors. But of these

alluring country pleasures he was unconscious at the moment his mind being completely absorbed in the address he was about to deliver.

During the previous week he had heard, with righteous indignation, that a tent had been erected two fields distant from Ednagarvil School-house in which Gospel meetings were being held nightly by preachers said to belong to the Baptist persuasion. Such an unwarranted invasion of staunch Presbyterian territory he held to be outrageous.

Consequently he had "turned up the churn" and had reclaimed his famous sermon, entitled "Is Infant Baptism in Accordance with the Teaching and Practice of Scripture?"—a confirmation of which he considered could not be contraverted by any moderately intelligent person. On the back of the manuscript were noted the various occasions when and where he had delivered it :— "Ballydeuteronomy, 3/6/59"; "Kildarragh, 7/10/52"; "Daffadilly, 10/2/53"; "Killyclabber, 9/6/56"; "1st Castleferran, 6/11/58"; "Ballydeuteronomy (again), 4/6/60."

As he swung along his mind kept going forcibly over the subject matter under its various heads until he arrived at "finally, my brethren," which last division summed up with increasing vehemence the whole question incontrovertibly.

So lost was he in his theme, his lips moving audibly, and his arms gesticulating to the hedges on either side, that on rounding a sharp corner he almost clenched the argument of his peroration by a blow on the nose of a startled cow coming from the opposite direction and followed at a little distance by her owner.

This unforeseen incident brought him back sharply to earth, and drawing himself up he stopped on the moment and awaited the driver, whom he knew.

Now the reverend gentleman had been brought up on a farm, and still found his only relaxation in superintendence of the working of a small farm attached to his manse, and if there was anything, apart from ecclesiastical matters, that aroused his interest it was a fine cow. So as he waited he looked the animal over approvingly.

"Good-evening, Mr. McBriar," he greeted, holding out his hand. "Are you all well?"

"The best," rejoined the elder. "How is your own health, sir?"

"My health keeps wonderfully good, thank God! for my time of life."

"Aye, that's the truth; you stan' it well, sir, so you do."

"I have no reason whatever to complain."

"I suppose, now," said the elder, "that you're for Ednagarvil."

"I am."

"Did you hear that there's tent-preachin' there this past week?"

"So I understand. What religion do these preachers profess? I may have been misinformed."

"Oh, just one of them sects," replied the elder contemptuously, "'dippers,' the people call them. People are easy carried away now-a-days. The House of God isn't good enough for them; salvation must be found under tent flaps."

"Quite true, Mr. McBriar, quite true, and I also perceive that the youth of to-day are easily captivated

by what the Apostle Paul calls 'every wind of doctrine.'"

"There's one thing certain anyway," declared Mr. McBriar, "none of our ones will be found in it. I have laid down the law about that."

"You are entirely in the right in doing so, Mr. McBriar, entirely in the right." The Reverend Jeremy made this comment somewhat absently, for his eyes during the entire conversation had strayed surreptitiously to the cow, that, grateful for this prolonged discussion, was seizing the opportunity to snatch as much as possible of the extra succulent growth in the "shough" by the roadside.

"Yes, Mr. McBriar, I repeat you are wise to prevent your household from frequenting such unauthorized gatherings. The young are apt to go out of curiosity, and their immature minds may be impressed by plausible arguments. That seems a fine animal you have there, Mr. McBriar."

"Aye, sir, she's all that, an' more," said her owner proudly. I was just drivin' her down to the meadow as a work of necessity on the Sabbath Day," he defended himself.

"Certainly, to be sure," agreed the minister, "but isn't it lamentable, Mr. McBriar, how little regard there is for that day at the present time, compared with formerly? Its desecration is deplorable, indeed. She looks like a good milker, Mr. McBriar."

"You would go a long way to beat her, Mr. Sturrock give me a Strowberry for that. Well, as I was tellin' you, I hear that these two young fellows that's preachin' over beyant has the tent filled every night."

"Wandering stars, Mr. McBriar, just wandering stars

Are you by any chance thinking of parting with this animal?"

"Well, indeed, sir, to tell you the truth, I was plannin' to try her in Castleferran Fair a Wednesday next."

"Indeed. Is that so? Do you tell me that?" The minister kept his eye on the cow for some time, as if judging her good points. "I like," he said, "her small, fine head that is a good sign. A cow with a large head is of a more masculine type and is never, in my opinion, so good a milker."

"Do you stan' in need of a good milker, Mr. Sturrock?"

"I have, indeed, recently been considering the purchase of one but this is not the day, Mr. McBriar, to discuss our worldly affairs."

"No, sir, it is not; but it's no harm to admire a fine animal that the Master made on the Sabbath Day."

"True, Mr. McBriar, quite true. They are part of God's creation, and, indeed, it is so ordered that we must attend to their wants as on other days . a work both of necessity and mercy. But, as I was saying, Mr. McBriar, it is deplorable that the Sabbath is being more and more secularized. Now, for instance. in my young days visiting was strictly forbidden, whereas now it has come to be a universal custom among all classes, I am sorry to say."

At this assertion the elder felt slightly guilty, for at that moment a guest sat by his parlour fire after enjoying a solid tea. He consoled his conscience, however, by reflecting that the conversation of Mr. Job Jefferson, ruling elder in Tough congregation, was not likely to defile the sacred day.

Seeing that the minister was still eyeing the cow and, as he thought, enviously, to give him time to think, Mr. McBriar enlarged on the subject under discussion.

"Aye, Mr. Sturrock, there's terrible profligation of the Sabbath these times, without a doubt. It would scarr our fathers, so it would. My own mother, now, wouldn't make her bed on that day for fear of offending her Maker, an' I mind well that of a Monday we took good care to keep out of her way, she was that kurnaptious with not having slept comfortable the night afore."

"It showed principle, Mr. McBriar, it showed principle. I myself wouldn't shave on Sabbath mornings. I invariably do that on Saturday night when I have finished my sermon. Does she require a 'mash' when being milked, Mr. McBriar?"

"Not at all, sir; she's a fine, good-natured beast, an' lets it down easy."

"I must say," confessed the minister, "I like her appearance, and were it not the day it is I'm certain we might come to terms. I would just like to know what you intended to ask for her in the fair."

"Well, I might say somewhat roun' about twelve or mebbe thirteen poun'."

"It sounds a high price, Mr. McBriar, but I'm sure it is not above her value."

"Well, Mr. Sturrock, seein' it's yourself, an' to oblige you, if this wasn't the Sabbath Day, I would let you have her for mebbe eleven poun' ten."

The minister gave one long lingering look of appreciation. "Well, Mr. McBriar, I would be willing to give that for her."

"She's a good bargain, Mr. Sturrock, an' I promise

you that you'll not be disappointed in her. Will I drive her over in the mornin' for you?"

"That will do admirably, Mr. McBriar, and I will then pay you but let us speak no more of the matter, seeing it is the evening of the Sabbath Day."

On this occasion the service in the Ednagarvil School-house was not so well attended as usual, the counter attraction of the tent proving more inviting for some usually regular worshippers.

The menfolk mostly sat on forms placed against the wall, while the women occupied the seats facing the preacher. Gideon Blair had taken his place on a side bench from where he could have an uninterrupted view of Susan Stacey sitting right in front. He was feeling quite pleased with himself and circumstances in general, until, just as the minister was saying: "Let us commence our service this evening by singing to God's praise in the Fortieth Psalm," the door opened and he was exasperated to see that the late-comer was none other than Samuel Nethercote tip-toeing stealthily to the very seat beside him. While trying to forget his unwelcome neighbour he listened avidly to Susan's rich, full voice, which thrilled him as it had never done before, and watched her body sway to the rhythm of "Kilmarnock" as she sang. His eyes dwelt on her sweet, irregular profile framed by the coils of her corn-coloured hair, not now, indeed, so bright as on the never-forgotten day when she stood in her father's cornfield with the red rowan berries twined in it. Glancing furtively sideways he was aware, to his chagrin, that Samuel's eyes also rested on the same adorable object.

A long prayer followed the psalm, including in its widely embracing petitions an earnest plea for forgiveness for those who had failed to keep holy "this sacred day now drawing to a close."

The sermon was listened to respectfully as the preacher defended and, as he firmly believed, established without doubt the doctrine of Infant Baptism as Scriptural and concluded impressively: "In the end of the day one thing only will really matter, not when you were baptized, nor where you were baptized, nor whether you were ever baptized at all, only this: Whether you have answered the Saviour's call, whether you have been born again, baptized with the Holy Spirit, and washed from your sins in the precious blood of Jesus Christ."

It was a long sermon, and the light in the little school-house was beginning to fail during the last prayer, so that psalm books were of little avail. The minister therefore announced "the Twenty-third Psalm, with which you are all familiar." There was music soft and sweet as the strains of Martyrdom rose and fell in the semi-darkness:

Yea, though I walk through death's dark vale,
Yet will I fear none ill,
For Thou art with me and Thy rod
And staff me comfort still.

After the Benediction, Gideon hung back under pretence of complimenting Mr. Sturrock on his "able discourse," while Susan was exchanging greetings with the other women worshippers. Samuel Nethercote also lingered for no apparent reason. Immediately Susan

and her little niece, Minnie, turned homewards, Gideon boldly joined them, so did Samuel, with the result that the four were all walking abreast on the narrow road in the romantic twilight, now being lightened by a rising moon.

"Isn't it a lovely night, now that the moon has rose?" remarked Susan, wondering greatly why she had such an escort, for while Gideon's residence could be reached by that road, to Samuel's it was a round-about.

"Aye," agreed Gideon, "it's a gran' night, but we're bound to have 'bruckle' weather soon, for she has a 'brough' round her."

"It's a certain bad sign," corroborated Samuel, and all gazed up at the prophetic moon frolicing airily through the clouds with her ill-famed halo.

"Where does the moon go to when she leaves this?" inquired Minnie.

No one seemed eager to supply the information. At last Gideon brought forth his ever-ready Bible quotation. "The Scriptures say: 'He hath appointed the moon to shine for a season.'"

"But where does she go after that?" persisted Minnie.

"I would suspect," said Samuel, "that she goes to Australia, where the sun goes, for I heard Tom Burke tell that on Christmas Day they ett their dinner out in the garden. But he says more nor his prayers. I mind, after he came home from Australia, he told wonderful stories. He said some animals had pockets to carry their young ones in, an' everybody kept smilin' an' sayin', 'Dear-a-dear, an' do you tell me that?' But it did no harm, for nobody ever believed a word he said."

"Well, we should be thankful to the moon for the meetin's in Winter-time; the evenin's are gettin' long now, an' unless the swarree next week is kept up late we'll hardly need her."

"Oh, aye, everybody's goin' to it; it'll be a great night," said Samuel. "Are you comin', Gideon?"

"Of course, for I had to buy a ticket for it an' may as well get my moneysworth. The speeches are always good, but I'm not sure we should have a magic lantern in the meeting-house. It would mind you of the theatre too much."

Neither Gideon nor any of his hearers had ever been in such a wicked place, but they guessed it was lurid, and, as Gideon often described it, "the straight road down to the bottomless pit."

The Stacey lonain' was now reached and the romantic moon-light walk over without having advanced any perceptible progress on the part of either suitor. The excursion into astronomy had led nowhere.

Just at the moment of parting, however, Gideon sprang a mean surprise on his former friend: "I'll just drop in an' see Thomas," he said to Susan, "I b'lieve he's complainin' again."

"It's only a touch of the brownkatus that he's partial to," said Susan, "but he'll be right glad to see you an' have a wee crack with you. Good-night, Samuel."

And "Good-night, Samuel," added Gideon.

Samuel went on his way slowly and thoughtfully and after a few steps a sudden enlightenment dawned on him. He stopped, slapped his knee, and muttered:

"He has took a backspang on me, the oul' arch-hypocrite. It would be more fittin' for him to look out a widda woman nearer his own age. He lets on him an' me is of an age an' says when the one dies the other may quake for fear. But there's a brave difference, an' I havent to take a pair of specs yet to meetin' to find my place. I'm sartin sure she wouldn't look at the side of the road he's on, the oul' misert."

CHAPTER VIII.

FANNY'S FASCINATION

Although they had quite finished their mid-day dinner the Reverend Alexander Lovekin and his sister, Arabella, still sat at table. She insisted that he should not move for ten minutes after every meal, because his digestion demanded that course of inaction. Her mission in life was to try and persuade him to believe that he was delicate all over.

"Alexander," she would confide to all and sundry (she was his senior by ten years) "has never been really what you would call robust, and I have difficulty in making him husband his strength, for he is inclined to spend it far too willingly."

Therefore she considered it to be her heaven-sent duty to shield him from—as she considered it—a rapacious congregation, and above all to guard him from the wiles of plausible females, whom she intuitively knew aspired to the honour and rank of the Daffadilly minister's consort.

"And now, Alexander," she instructed, at length rising, "go straight to your study and try to snatch half-an-hour's sleep, for I'm afraid you didn't sleep well last night; you looked pale at breakfast and your eyes were heavy-looking; you must really get earlier to bed, for it is a well-proved saying that one hour's sleep before twelve o'clock is worth . " Here Mr. Lovekin, who was sitting opposite, suddenly broke off her lecture, making a sound like "tch, tch, tch" with her

tongue against the roof of her mouth, betokening extreme irritation.

"Well I never!" she explained, "if here isn't Fanny Sturrock coming in at the gate with that mannerless dog of hers that leaves white hairs all over the place She's in a perfect flower garden of a dress and she has positively a hat with red poppies stuck on her red hair."

Mr. Lovekin, who a moment ago had looked rather dejected while listening to his sister's admonitions on matters relating to his health, all at once brightened up at this information and turned quickly round to look out of the window at his back. The gay dress and poppied hat seemed to act like a stimulant.

"That girl," warned Arabella for the fiftieth time, "is a born flirt—especially with the clergy. She would flirt with the Moderator, or the Pope for that matter, if she got the chance. I'm afraid you will have to see her now, Alexander, for she has seen you and is actually waving her hand to you. I'll tell Mary to show her into the drawing-room."

Mary was already opening the door with a broad smile of welcome, for Fanny's merry face carried fascination for everyone in its smiles and dimples.

Miss Lovekin preceded her brother out of the room, hastily summoning up all her dignity to contend with the pretty visitor and her refractory dog, and found Miss Sturrock still standing in the hall peremptorily calling 'Smut, Smut, come here at once.' But Smut had just disappeared kitchenwards and was not paying the slightest attention to her commands.

His mistress apologized for him. "He always tries to find the pantry every place he goes," she said.

"Just let him stay out there, and come into the

drawing-room," suggested Miss Lovekin. "Alexander, close the door," but Mr. Lovekin was forced in double quick time to open it again, for scarcely were they seated than there was a frantic scratching on its panels, and Smut dashed headlong into the room, his nose decorated by some unpleasant looking mixture doubtless contracted by research in the bucket under the scullery sink, and attempted to mount Mr. Lovekin's knee had not his mistress intercepted him to prevent it. Taking him on her own knee she wiped his face with her handkerchief and finally bestowed a swift kiss on it.

"That, Miss Fanny," commented the minister, "is a waste of good material."

"Nothing is too good for Smut," rejoined Fanny, and when he annoys some people by jumping up on their grand clothes with his muddy paws, I have my revenge, for I just say to myself, "there's not much blue blood in you."

"Why don't you say it out loud?" urged Mr. Lovekin.

"Some day I may if I'm provoked. People reveal their pedigree more by their attitude to dogs than in any other way."

Fanny was all effusiveness. "I hope you like my new dress, Miss Lovekin. There is no use asking Mr. Lovekin; men never seem to notice such important things. I made it myself, and the whole damage only came to five and elevenpence."

"You are clever with your hands," Miss Lovekin condescended to say, and thought: "She wants Alexander to know how economical she is."

"And this is my last summer's hat—only the flowers new. I hope you like it, I trim all my own hats."

"It is beautiful and most becoming," supplied Mr. Lovekin.

"How is your father?" demanded Miss Lovekin.

"Oh! nothing ever ails him," returned Fanny lightly; "he is away, as usual, some place this afternoon, I really don't know where."

"Does he sleep well at night?" persisted Miss Lovekin.

"I think so. You see he exerts himself so much about the farm and the congregation and every other thing that gives him a chance that I'm sure he's dead tired. At the moment he is very enthusiastic over the purchase of a cow from Mr. McBriar—she's a 'Strowberry'"

"It's a great matter," said Miss Lovekin, "to have a good milk supply for the house. I endeavour to get my brother to drink a pint of milk daily, but he tries to avoid it."

"And he's quite right," said Fanny, smiling encouragingly at the delinquent, "it's nauseous stuff."

At this debateable point Smut absolutely refused to sit still on Fanny's knee any longer, and making his escape landed with his two forepaws on the minister's white shirt front (and it was only Monday), who, to please Fanny, had unfortunately given him an encouraging pat.

Miss Lovekin felt that the limits of her endurance were ended and hastily thought: "I'll have tea in at once and get rid of her and that abominable animal and save Alexander's time from being wasted. He might now be having a nice sleep only for her. She is far too exciting, I can see, for his weak nerves."

Most unwillingly she rose to do so, for she entirely

disliked the idea of leaving Fanny and Alexander alone together. When obliged by household affairs to leave Alexander and any young lady visitor alone unchaperoned, her precautious method was to wander into the room at intervals on the pretext of looking for a needle. Fanny had before now witnessed that futile search with intense amusement.

"I must apologize, Mr. Lovekin, for bringing Smut," said Fanny, when his sister had gone kitchenwards. "I really believed him to be securely shut up, but when I was half-way here he overtook me; you see, he breaks his heart if I leave him."

"That is because he loves you, Miss Fanny," declared the minister gallantly, throwing all his soul into his pale blue eyes.

"Indeed there is no question of that. I always say that if I could find a man who would love me as my dog does I would marry him."

"You'll have no difficulty in finding that gentleman, Miss Fanny."

The door opened to admit Miss Lovekin followed by Mary carrying the tray, at which interruption the tone of conversation altered, Mr. Lovekin being heard to ask Miss Sturrock if she had heard the new minister of 1st Castleferran preach yet.

"I have," said Fanny, "he preached for father on 'Fast Day.'"

"He is said to be a fine preacher," joined in Miss Lovekin.

"I'm really not much of a judge of sermons," confessed Fanny, "but I know, although he is rather little, he is decidedly good-looking."

"He is engaged," said Miss Lovekin severely.

"Perhaps," smiled Fanny.

"Have you heard the joke concerning his announcement the first Sunday he preached?" asked Mr. Lovekin. "It appears he announced that he wouldn't attend any funerals on Sabbath Days but that he would be *happy* to take them on week-days."

Even Miss Lovekin joined in the laugh at Mr. Newcome's expense. "The poor man was nervous, of course. Well, we'll all hear him, I'm sure, at the Kildarragh soirée. I expect he will speak at it."

"He will," said Fanny; "he told me so."

Said Miss Lovekin: "I should think that Mr. Adair may soon get engaged to Miss Gordon. He is evidently a great admirer. I hope these rumours going in the neighbourhood about her and a very unsatisfactory young man are groundless."

Fanny ignored the remark bearing on her friend's conduct and merely remarked "Eunice wouldn't marry a minister; she has often told me so."

"She might be very glad to get one."

"Oh! for that matter she could get several. Eunice desires a gayer life than that of a country manse."

When they hadn't quite finished tea Fanny threw her bomb. Turning to Mr. Lovekin smilingly she said: "But I haven't yet told you my errand here to-day. Father wishes to know if you would exchange with him on Sabbath next. He wants you to give your celebrated sermon on temperance—you know how rabid he is on that subject."

Mr. Lovekin looked immensely pleased. "I shall be happy to comply with his wishes, Miss Fanny, and am grateful that he finds my effort in that cause worthy of notice."

"Then I may tell father that you will do so, and of course you will stay for dinner with us."

"Oh, no, thank you, Miss Sturrock," interposed his sister, "he had much better come straight home and get a rest, for that is the evening he has to take the service in Ednagarvil School-house."

"But father particularly wishes him to stay, for he wants to discuss with him some urgent matter that has arisen in the Presbytery—I don't know what, but it is controversial and he would like Mr. Lovekin's opinion.

"I shall be very pleased to stay," said Mr. Lovekin, avoiding his sister's warning eye.

There was still another trial for poor Miss Lovekin. Mary appeared at the door to inform her that Paddy Mallon wanted to see her at once, as he was in a bit of a hurry, about the whitewashing of the kitchen. She was unwillingly obliged to ask her visitor to excuse her for a few minutes, thus leaving Alexander unguarded again.

"Perhaps you would like to see the garden, Miss Fanny," the unprotected one suggested.

"Yes, indeed, I would love to see it, for your May tulips are always enchanting, I know."

He led the way out, and they walked sedately beside the gay borders that evoked bursts of admiration from Fanny, whilst the minister tried not to see Smut's havoc among his flower-beds.

Finally they drifted into the "summer-house," and as they entered the Reverend Alexander smiled archly at Fanny. "I wonder," he said, "does my sister keep any needles out here!!"

Instead of going home direct, Fanny made a detour by Kildarragh House in the hope that she might find Eunice alone, and if not she would ask her to walk part of the way back with her, for her heart yearned sore over her dearest friend. Until recently they were almost inseparable, and now when they did meet Eunice seemed altered and constrained, not like the voluble old Eunice who used to call Fanny her "twin-soul," and between whom a bond of perfect understanding was always complete.

On nearing the gate she counted herself fortunate to see Eunice before her with Towzer, and ran to overtake her. Eunice kissed her friend as usual and insisted on her coming in to have tea with them, but Fanny refused and instead asked her to turn and walk a little way home with her.

Strange to say there followed an unusual silence. Eunice seemed to have nothing to say, and kept throwing stones for Towzer to retrieve. Fanny put her arm around her and said: "Eunice, dear, I most earnestly want you to stop that flirtation with that Dublin man—I hope it is nothing more."

Eunice flushed deeply. "Oh! there's no harm in it," she protested.

"You may imagine so, Eunice, but there is. You are lowering yourself, for he is not your equal in any way. Are you falling in love with him?"

"I like him very much and enjoy talking to him, for he has seen a good deal of the world and can talk of other things than farming and turnips and ministers and meetings—all I ever hear discussed in this back-of-beyond place."

"He may be very plausible—likely is—but he is not respected, I can tell you, around Castleferran—for one thing, he drinks."

"How do you know?"

"I have been told by those who have seen him the worse of it."

"Well I never have, but no one is perfect."

"Eunice, love, you don't know what you are talking about, you have never associated with people of his kind."

"Mr. Lovekin must have been giving you a temperance lecture, I think," said Eunice lightly.

"You are not yourself when you talk like that, Eunice—you are changed already. Eunice, darling, give him up, I implore you."

"Not just yet, Fanny. He has brought some brightness into my life, which is deadly dull. I often wish I could get away from Kildarragh altogether. To live in a city, now, and hear good music and see good plays, and be in the swing of everything that's worth while in life, wouldn't it just be grand?"

"That is all very well, but those things pall, too. There are worse places than Kildarragh, and I would dearly love to see you married to Mr. Adair; you know yourself he worships the ground you walk on."

"I wonder why, for my giddiness would break his heart."

"You will break it if you marry anyone else. Eunice, dear, I ask you how this foolish affair is to end, and I only hope that nothing harmful will come to you by reason of it."

"Nothing, dear Fanny—nothing—you may rest quite assured of that. Now I really must turn at once or

I'll be late for tea, and father is so particular about punctuality at meals as about everything else. You see I cannot even stay out as long as I like, for he questions me when I go in."

She kissed Fanny hastily. "Good-bye, old dear, it worries me to see you so woe-begone over nothing. I'm all right. Come on, Towzer."

Fanny went on homewards sorrowfully. "What can I do more to save my lovely sweet Eunice?" she prayed. "I have a premonition of disaster, for Eunice was always headstrong."

CHAPTER IX.

THE "SWARREE"

Eagerly looked forward to from year to year was the Kildarragh "swarree"—positively a night of enchantment!

This semi-sacred, semi-humorous function commenced, after a "blessing" had been invoked by the minister, with a plentiful libation of strong tea accompanied by currant buns—large ones containing a paucity of currants, and when everyone was supposed to be gorged there followed a magic lantern show, and when it had exhausted its *repertoire,* songs and speeches finished off the evening's entertainment.

In the meeting-house strong planks were laid along the tops of pews to form tables, from behind which ladies of the congregation "poured," while at the rear of the church there glowed an immense "turf" fire, red as a furnace. Over the fire was a gate taken off its hinges supporting huge black kettles that belched forth their hospitable steam to the sky.

In the boiling kettles were deposited muslin bags of tea, and when they were considered "well-drawn," stewards filled tea-pots and placed them before the pourers, afterwards distributing it in mugs and handing currant buns on trays to the revellers amid such a clatter of tongues that it was almost impossible to catch what one's neighbour was saying.

At the topmost table next the pulpit, as befitting their rank, Miss Gordon and Miss Eunice Gordon poured, not

into mugs, but into Gordon china cups and saucers, the slightly smoked liquid (but this flavour only hall-marked it as being real "swarree" tea) for distinguished guests, for whom seats around this table were reserved for ministers accompanied by their wives, sisters or daughters. Also daintier fare, such as sandwiches and cake, provided by Miss Matilda, was the happy portion of these privileged ones.

Having finished and enjoyed heartily his cup of rather strong tea, the Reverend Alexander Lovekin rose, and approaching Eunice, begged her to permit him another cup of that "really delicious beverage," while close on his heels followed his sister to forbid it. "Now, Alexander, you have had quite enough and may not sleep a wink if you drink any more."

But Arabella was too late to rescue him. Eunice had already filled his cup to the brim, ignoring Miss Lovekin's piteous appeals for hot water. "You like it sweet, I think, too, Mr. Lovekin; how many lumps?" she was saying, and Mr. Lovekin gallantly replied: "Just look into it, Miss Eunice, and it will taste quite sweet enough."

Fanny Sturrock had managed to seat herself between a student of the Presbytery and the Reverend Alexander to Miss Lovekin's dismay. How a good man like the Reverend Jeremy Sturrock could be the father of such a brazenly designing daughter she could not conceive. Something decorous, surely, was to be expected from an upbringing in the manse! But Fanny with her bronze red hair, *retroussé* nose, and flirtish audacity, it appeared, did "the cloth" no credit.

Hugh was here, there and everywhere directing, controlling, and making himself generally agreeable to all

and sundry. Eunice waylaid him in these duties and thrust a cup of tea into his hand, which he drank absently while munching one of Miss Matilda's excellent sandwiches.

When appetites flagged there was some horseplay among the youths, pellets of buns being used as missiles to startle some unsuspecting friend at a distance, and practical jokes played by exuberant spirits on those nearby. A truly jovial evening it was, and everybody was out "to make a night of it."

Tea was over. All were thoroughly replete. There was much boasting and competition as to how many currant buns each had consumed. A tradition existed that the true soirée reveller should fast most of the day beforehand in order to do justice to the feast. Tables were cleared away, and everybody now endeavoured to get seated beside those whose proximity would most ensure their happiness—for the priceless magic lantern offered opportunities for love-making not to be neglected.

What a world's wonder it was, to be sure! Nothing earthly could ever beat this last word in invention. Also looked forward to were the songs and speeches—humorous, they hoped. It was well worth working hard all the year round to participate in such an exciting orgy as this.

So thought Susan Stacey, wedged between her two small nieces, Minnie and Maggie, and so immersed in pure enjoyment that she was startled to hear a voice she recognized say: "Let me in beside your auntie, Minnie, that's a good wee girl," and Gideon Blair

squeezed past and contrived to seat himself on the scanty accommodation available.

No sooner was this adroit manoeuvre accomplished than Samuel Nethercote boldly pushed himself into the seat behind, planting his elbows on the book-ledge, so that if Gideon attempted to whisper into Susan's ear next him, he would have possession of the other.

The magic lantern now began its amazing performance with a series of kaleidoscopic whirligigs and fantastic curlicues, evoking shouts and exclamations of wonderment accompanied by appreciative stamping of feet. Having soon exhausted its exuberance it gradually settled down and decided to educate the beholders in geography, whom it rightly suspected had never travelled a great deal farther than their nearest country town, by flinging boldly on the screen The Lake of Lucerne. Such blue sky and blue water its audience had never witnessed before, save possibly the women on wash-days.

What wonderful sights, to be sure, there were in the world, if only people had the money to see them. Gideon was inspired to say to Susan: "Wouldn't that be a gran' place for a weddin' trip," and Samuel, behind, listening, retorted: "All the weddin' trip you'll ever get, Gideon, will be to the meetin'-house an' back."

The lantern continued to show gorgeously-coloured pictures of far-off lands dotted with gigantic palms, under which villainous-looking black men scantily clad stood or sat, apparently having no work to do. These scenes made everyone think of the Foreign Mission.

In the back seat, happiest of all in that rapturous throng, sat Christina McBriar and Archie McKillop hand-in-hand. Mr. McBriar, having had to stay at

home "by the stuff," and Mrs. McBriar, proving a feeble chaperone, seated between Nellie and Agnes in the front seat, had long ago lost sight of both Christina and Bob, and failed to enjoy the pictures for anxious thoughts of these two deserters, who had sought more enticing company.

Mr. Lovekin was in clover! On one side sat Eunice, on the other Fanny. Poor Miss Lovekin's evening was completely spoiled, although she felt somewhat relieved to notice that Fanny's attentions were equally divided between her brother and the theological student.

Strange to say, the Lucerne picture suggested the same idea to Mr. Lovekin as to the less intellectual Gideon. "What a paradise for a honeymoon!" he exclaimed, for the benefit of both his young ladies, and Eunice, lost in her own thoughts, roused herself to remark: "It is not the place but the person that makes the ideal honeymoon." Involuntarily she stole a glance at Hugh, and said to herself: "Once I thought it might have been you, but now I know it will be someone else." Her mind strayed from the tea-party in the meeting-house and from the clerical philanderer by her side to someone who had never, she was certain, been in such primitive surroundings. She smiled to herself at connecting that "someone"—a polished man of the world—with such a crude entertainment as a country soirée.

"I feel now entirely convinced," she told herself, "that it would be utterly impossible for me to live out my life in this place—country ministers and country soirées. I want to hear Lohengrin, to see Romeo and Juliet. I want " She was awakened from her romancing by hearing her own name spoken. Hugh was

saying : " Miss Eunice Gordon will now favour us with a song," and as he did so he looked down at her. She rose hastily and took his proffered hand to assist her to mount the improvised platform. There she stood a moment, swaying a little nervously as she unrolled her music in the expectant hush. The stillness was intense as her low, sweet voice thrilled her listeners in that poignant song as yet unfamiliar to them.

" In the gloaming, Oh! my darling." To one present his pleasure was pierced by pain as the haunting words fell on flushed ears. Oh ! so lovely the singer, her dark hair falling in curls around her face, so sweet, so innocent of the world's wickedness. " Always, always, no matter what comes or goes, I shall remember you to life's end, and just as I see you now," he thought as the foreboding words :

" In the gloaming, Oh! my darling
Think not bitterly of me.
Though I passed away in silence,
Left you lonely, set you free"

took possession of his brain, and do what he would he could not banish them while he did his duty as chairman, announced the items, applauded, even laughed when expected of him.

The Reverend Jeremy Sturrock was next called upon for a speech. Now the student Fanny had captured was unaware of her identity, although the two had been chatting pleasantly all along, for Fanny's practice was to consider introductions superfluous. On hearing Mr. Sturrock announced, he turned to Fanny with a wry smile and remarked : " That'll be two hours at least." Said Fanny : " If you like I'll ask him to be a little shorter. You see I am his daughter."

The miserable young man failed to join in her amusement. He listened most attentively, and when the speech ended in much less time than his critic had predicted, paid him the tribute of extra hearty applause.

It was a more serious address than the spirit of the evening demanded, but was listened to by reason of the universal regard with which the good minister was held by the entire countryside.

It was during the progress of this uplifting deliverance of Mr. Sturrock that Samuel Nethercote chose to play a fiendish trick planned beforehand on his former friend and present rival, Gideon.

Samuel had provided himself with sweets called conconversation lozenges. On the one he handed over her shoulder to Susan was printed the startling question: "Will you marry me?" But alas! engrossed as she was in Mr. Sturrock's earnest address, Susan put it into her mouth without really reading it, to his disappointment. He also gave one to Minnie and one to Maggie very much to their satisfaction.

But for Gideon Blair Samuel had appointed a special treat in the form of a particularly powerful "biting Billy," and very soon felt repaid for his troubles by observation of its distressing effects. Gideon, who believed it was more blessed to receive than to give, and was partial to sweets that he had not to buy himself, took it gratefully and commenced to crunch it at once. Of a sudden his face became scarlet and his throat emitted spluttering, choking, weird sounds that caused everyone in his vicinity to turn round and stare at him with alarm depicted on their faces. Unable to endure its cayenne ingredients he had perforce to spit it out

openly on the floor, or what remained of it, for he had swallowed a fair portion and his throat was on fire. While frenziedly trying to cool his parched lips with his burning tongue, and still spluttering audibly, he was infuriated to hear Samuel's smothered laughter behind and also the uncontrollable giggles of Minnie and Maggie. Susan herself, he noticed, was holding her handkerchief well over her mouth, and on all the faces round smiles had replaced anxiety as their owners grasped the situation.

Gideon glowered behind him at Samuel, and although this was the climax of the amusing drama, yet if a look could murder, Samuel Nethercote would have been carried out on the instant.

This treacherous episode completely ruined the remainder of Gideon's evening. Until then he had flattered himself that his suit was progressing satisfactorily and that he had cleverly outwitted his rival by installing himself so close to Susan. But when he saw her with her handkerchief over her mouth and her eyes filled with merriment he felt as humiliated as his self-importance would permit him.

On the contrary, to his rival, Samuel, the evening went merrily from then, and for days afterwards when he recalled the look of Gideon in the throes of the "biting Billy" he would laugh aloud and slap his knee. "Paddy was up to the gauger that time," he complimented himself. "I'm even with that oul' arch-hypocrite now!"

Fanny's student next contributed "Belle Mahome" to the evening's programme. Ah! those sweet, sentimental songs of the 'seventies! How they lingered in

minds and hearts for a lifetime. "Wait for me at Heaven's gate, sweet Belle Mahome."

All were now eager to sample the new minister of 1st Castleferran, reported to be so advanced—perhaps not quite sound—for he was already making changes in the worship of that hitherto orthodox church, and true Presbyterianism, like the Church of Rome, changes not. He was, for example, the first in that Presbytery, to adopt the "dog-collar," and was pronounced by the Kildarragh audience to be "consaity-lookin'," but none could deny that he was an eloquent speaker, better fitted, however, for a pulpit than a soirée platform. They listened patiently, however, to his high-flown periods, inwardly wishing he would "give over" till they would experience the treat they knew now awaited them when "the Reverend Lovekin" would ascend the platform.

When he did so, looking intensely shy, the audience were prepared to "split their sides." He had been kept to the last on the principle of the "good wine," and was welcomed with cheers and loud applause.

"Do not exert yourself, Alexander," his sister had warned him before leaving home, "and here are some black currant lozenges. Keep them in your vest pocket and put one in your mouth before speaking and another after you have finished before coming out into the night air."

After highly complimentary remarks on the previous speakers and singers, Mr. Lovekin set himself to "bring down the house."

"As most of you know," he began, "I have an appointment as licensee of marriages to the Presbytery; perhaps some of you have already passed through my hands in that capacity, and I sincerely hope none

here bears me a grudge at any rate on that account. (Laughter.) I assure you I derive from my office great knowledge, chiefly humorous, of human nature. (A voice) 'Why don't you try it yourself?' Alas! my friend, the ladies fight shy of me. (Loud laughter.) When I see two persons standing at my gate, seemingly unable to come further, I can guess what their errand is. Quite recently a young man arrived accompanied by a charming young woman, and as both declared themselves of full age I granted their desires and sent them away happy. The very next morning I was informed before I was out of bed that an elderly man, seemingly in a great state of distress, wanted to see me urgently. He turned out to be the father of the pretty girl of the day before and his errand was 'to forbid the banns.' I reasoned with him and tried to assure him that, as his daughter declared she was over twenty-one years of age, I had no other option than to grant the licence, and that he was powerless to prevent the marriage. At that information he burst into tears and sobbed out: 'My wee girl would never have thought of such a thing if somebody hadn't put it in her head!'" (Loud laughter, stamping of feet and applause.) Similar amusing stories followed, and he was cheered to the echo.

"It is late," he said, "and I will now conclude (cries of 'go on') with a local story, which I leave you to judge whether it is true or otherwise. It is said, at any rate, to be founded on fact.

"You are all, I am sure, well acquainted with the petrifying properties of our own beautiful romantic Lough Neagh. It is said that if any substance be left in it for a time it will turn to stone. Well, once upon

a time a fisherman, whose habit it was to stand fishing with one leg in and the other out of the water, discovered to his surprise that one of his legs was actually turning to stone! Was he dismayed at this prospect? Not he, for he was a Tyrone man, and therefore not easily daunted. Instead, said he: 'My fortune's made, for I'll just travel the country and sharpen the people's knives and scissors and anything else that's blunt on it!' And that's just what he did, and he had the time of his life, and lived to a ripe old age, welcome in every house, having a shanagh and a share of every meal was going, and telling the news of the country and hearing it, and paid forby. Tyrone men for ever!"

Amid loud cheers Mr. Lovekin left the platform.

It was now after "elders' hours," but nobody minded. A whole year would pass before they would get such an opportunity of enjoying themselves again. All joined fervently in singing the Doxology, and the Reverend Hugh Adair pronounced the Benediction.

CHAPTER X.

THE ELOPEMENT.

Eunice—supposed to be gardening—had slipped out of the little green gate that led from the garden to her father's fields, as she had now done many times.

The hedges were white with the snow of the hawthorn, and from a pink hawthorn tree growing beside the path she plucked a spray and fastened it in her dress. Eunice never could resist flowers, the wild ones especially.

How buoyant she felt! "I must be really and truly in love to feel as I do," she assured herself. "I did not think one could feel such happiness in this world!" Her heart beat loud and fast as she glimpsed her lover —surely another sign. He took her in his arms and kissed her over and over again, and she felt powerless to resist his masterful embrace.

"Darling, your posy just matches your cheeks."

"It is the heat that makes them pink. I ran all the way and mustn't stay long, for I'm afraid someone has told father of our stolen meetings."

"Why, what has happened?"

"Nothing definite as yet, but I feel him looking at me in a strange way that makes me afraid of him. You see, he and Aunt Matilda have designed me for the minister."

He laughed. "You are far too pretty for a parson's wife; as far as I have observed they rarely marry beauty. It must be something else that attracts them. I sup-

pose this particular one is a pompous specimen himself."

"Oh, no, no," and as she protested she wondered why she was so warmly stirred to defend Hugh. "He is a dear. Sometimes I have fancied that I am in love with him myself. But he is far too good for me and I am afraid I would spoil his life."

"Has he asked you to spoil it?"

"Often, and now every time we meet."

This confession seemed to alarm Heskyn. He kept silent for a few minutes, apparently deep in thought.

"Eunice, listen to what I'm going to say to you, for I am in deadly earnest. You must marry me, *and at once*. My job here is almost finished, and I shall be going back to Dublin to another."

Of a sudden her heart that had beaten so quickly seemed to stop altogether, but she managed to murmur: "I'm sure you will be glad to get back, for you dislike the North."

"There will always be a warm spot in my heart for the North since it has given me you."

His arms were around her, and yet she felt deadly faint. "Going away!" She could scarcely let the thought enter her mind. He looked down at her and felt gratified. "Why, Eunice, the pink hawthorn has taken flight from your cheeks."

"I'll be so lonely when you go." Her thoughts ran back over the last six weeks of happy excitement. To return to the empty days before she met him would be insupportable—worse now than ever. Not until the threat of parting had actually presented itself had she realized what his companionship had meant to her. She knew

now that she must really love him, now that the end had come and she was about to lose him.

"Eunice, I love you desperately, and you love me, and the only thing is for you to come with me."

"Oh! that is impossible." Even as she said it she wondered was it.

"I am going to Dublin next week and will make arrangements for our marriage in a Registry Office there. Then when the time is in I will come back for you.

"No, no! I dare not." She tried to withstand him. "We'll wait a while and maybe father will be induced to consent when he sees how we love each other."

"We might both be grey by that time."

She knew it well. If she were to marry this man she believed she loved she must do it now in spite of everything and everybody. As in a Heavenly trance she listened to his pleading.

"Promise me now, Eunice—this very minute—that you will do it. It is really and truly the only way. Why should we break both our hearts?"

She felt herself completely in his hands—or rather arms, but roused herself with a tremendous effort to resist him. "Do let me go, Lawrence. I have stayed far too long and they will have missed me."

"You must promise me before you go. I mightn't see you again."

"I might do as you wish after a little if we find there is really no other way."

"No, there is absolutely no other way," he said firmly, "it must be now or never. I'll write to Bridget's address and let you know our plans."

Not see him again! She felt like a lost child.

"For remember, Eunice," he urged, "that you have promised, and it might not be safe to meet again till then."

He knew that he had won, kissed her and released her. She crept away from him in a turmoil of confused emotions such as she had never experienced before.

It was she who was first to see her father coming into the field towards them.

"Here's father! Here's father! What will we do? What *will* we do?"

It did not take Heskyn long to decide on his course of action. He simply turned on his heel and disappeared. But never till her dying day would Eunice forget the look her father gave her. She had seen him look terribly annoyed at times and really angry, now his face was distorted with his rage, ablaze with passion. He evidently could not speak, merely signed to her to follow him home, and it was not till the door closed on them that his fury found words. Only part of what he was saying did Eunice comprehend, for she was in a serious collapse and crying. She sometimes almost feared he might strike her to the ground.

"Stealing out like a low servant girl to the fields . you, a Gordon, bring such disgrace to the name your conduct is unpardonable brought up as you were never, never speak to that man again," and so on. When at last he commanded her to go to her room she was unspeakably thankful, "and stay there till you realize the enormity of your conduct, and the

unspeakable folly you are guilty of, and are sorry for what you have done."

Glad to escape, she fled from him. Lying on her bed in a state of fear and trembling, the strains of the psalm they were singing at "worship" floated up to her, causing her to feel as if she were excommunicated.

After a time she ceased crying. Her brain commenced to work again, and that wildly. Round and round through all that long night her distracted thoughts ran as if chasing one another, now ecstatic, then despairing. "What am I to do now?" she kept asking herself. "If I do what Lawrence asks, and, indeed, I have promised to do it, it is father's fault. He is driving me to it. What *am* I to do?"

She was offered no supper. Alice came up to bed and undressed in a reproachful silence. Next morning she brought up her breakfast with such a grave countenance as almost made the culprit smile, and gave a message solemnly: "Father says you are to stay here for a time."

That was exactly what Eunice desired—to be left alone with her bewildering thoughts. She had recovered her poise somewhat and was already planning what course she should take in the matter. She became rebellious. "They think I am overwhelmed and repentant, but indeed I am not." Finally she became defiant. "He loves me and I love him, and all the world cannot keep us apart. It is my fate. Tennyson says, 'No one can be more wise than destiny.' I am only sorry for Hugh—but he was not my fate, although he loves me too. Love can never run smooth, it appears. I hope he will console himself with Alice, for she is just cut out for a minister's wife."

Aunt Matilda visited Eunice in her prison "cell" at intervals. She felt quite compassionate towards the culprit and made utterly futile attempts to bring home to her the enormity of her offence. According to Aunt Matilda no woman of the Gordon race had ever stooped so low as to meet a young man in a field.

"Did you never, Aunt Matilda?" said Eunice, mischievously, exasperated by these reproaches.

"I," Aunt Matilda started, scarcely believing her ears, and after a pause of impressive dignity, "I was sought in marriage by the Reverend Eliezer Gillanders, a noted man of his day. He was even mentioned at one time for the Moderatorship." She sighed and looked wistfully beyond Eunice out of the window as if her thoughts had taken a far-away flight at mention of his name.

Eunice had heard in her childhood the Gillanders tradition, but she pretended ignorance and enquired: "And what happened, Aunt Matilda?"

"There was a misunderstanding, that is all I can say."

Eunice remembered hearing the word "jilted" used in connection with it, but she accepted the explanation feeling, herself in the happy consciousness of Lawrence's enduring love, sincere pity for her aunt's painful experience.

"Afterwards," went on Aunt Matilda, "I had other clerical admirers, for I always appealed to those who studied theology. I certainly would never have married a layman; to me they were insipid."

"That's just where you and I differ, Aunt Matilda, for I wouldn't marry a minister if he was the last man in the world."

"Don't speak so rashly, Eunice. Your father and I would be gratified to see you married to Mr. Adair, and it is quite apparent that he admires you."

"He wouldn't admire me long, for I would break his heart. How could he ever admire me again after meeting a man in a field?"

On Sunday Morning Mr. Gordon issued a decree that Eunice was to quit her seclusion and come to church as usual. So Eunice dressed obediently and came down the stairs slowly to find her father pacing up and down the hall, annoyed that everybody wasn't ready to go the minute he was, although it was quite early yet.

Eunice could not meet his eye. She could feel his searching gaze almost scorching her. His tones were like ice. "I hope you have come to your senses, now that you have had time to think over your shamelessness?"

Fortunately at that moment Aunt Matilda arrived on the scene panting. "I had no idea it was so late, Henry." Aunt Matilda lived in a chronic state of not knowing it was so late, and felt almost inclined to question the verdict of "Grandfather" himself, although it was an established fact that he had not erred ten minutes for generations.

A strange minister came into the pulpit—Mr. Newcome, the newly-ordained minister of 1st Castleferran—and there was what they called in Kildarragh a fine "turn-out" to savour him. He preached eloquently, yet, by the congregation the unanimous loyal opinion voiced was that they would as soon have their own man.

That Sunday evening passed as usual, more wearisome, thought Eunice, than any heretofore. But later Bridget coming in managed to convey a note into Eunice's hands. It was short: "*Going to Dublin in the morning and will return in three weeks' time; will let you know what to do then. All will come right if you trust your lover. You have promised.—L. H.*"

The trusty Bridget faithfully fulfilled her congenial task. Heskyn's letters were forwarded under cover addressed to her own home and always reached Eunice safely.

Then came one that made her almost tremble as she grasped its fateful contents. He would return to Castleferran on a certain Sunday evening, and on the following morning he would have a car waiting at the cross-roads below Kildarragh House at *six o'clock*. They would then drive to Hightown Junction and catch the first train to Dublin.

She read it once more, and her first reflection was that she was certain no "Gordon woman" had ever received such a letter before—or was there one, perhaps, in by-gone days that she resembled—and she almost smiled. But immediately a sense of the desperate step she was asked to take took possession of her, and she now felt unequal to it. She and her better self thrashed the matter out for two whole days and two nights, always returning to the same conclusion: "I am forced to do this, there is no other way open to me. I am driven to it. I must do it. I *will* do it."

Yet it was with a shaking hand holding the pen that she committed herself to the rather staggering proposal. "I shall be at the place mentioned at the time you say,"

she wrote, and placed her decision hesitatingly in Bridget's hands.

On Saturday Eunice gathered the few things she required to take with her—Heskyn had said he would buy her a trousseau in Dublin—and hid the case containing them from Alice's prying eyes, while all the time she kept wondering how she would escape from their bedroom on the Monday morning. All she could do was to rely on the youthful Alice's sound slumbers. If it were willed that she was to go, the way would be cleared for her, so at least she reasoned comfortably. She had already convinced herself, now that the step was taken, that she was not doing wrong in following her own inclinations.

On the last Sunday as she sat for the last time, probably, in the old family pew in the meeting-house she felt for the first time the real pangs of parting with everything familiar to her from her earliest years. Her guilty conscience kept persuading her that every eye in the congregation was on her, foreseeing the terrible disgrace she was about to bring, not alone on her family, but even on Kildarragh congregation.

One thing she could not make herself do—look steadily at the preacher. "Isn't it strange," she thought, "that he is the only person I feel sorry leaving. Jim, of course, I love dearly, and he loves me, I know, more than anyone else. Will he be taught to despise me? A case of 'Oh! no, we never mention her.'" Her thoughts raced on: "I wonder if I'll ever sit in this old building again, and strangely to-day I almost love it too. Perhaps when father hears how

happy I am—for of course I'll make Lawrence give up drink altogether—he will forgive me. He's bound to, sooner or later."

But would Hugh? What was that he was saying? "Love is suffering." Surely not. She glanced up at him and fancied he did, indeed, look as though he were suffering. But ah! how noble he looked. An inward light seemed to shine on the broad brow, from which the fair hair was brushed back, that seemed to transfigure his strong features and gave to his countenance a blend of sweetness and strength.

Once she met his eyes and sought in them, conscience-stricken as she was, for condemnation, but found instead only a wistful reproach that made hers fall. Like his Master, if he were the stern denouncer of wrong-doing, like Him he had compassion also for the erring one.

It was strange that on that Sunday of all days, and contrary to custom, Eunice was fated to walk down the path and to the waiting car by the minister's side.

Aunt Matilda, while apparently absorbed in devotion, had detected that bane of her life called dust in the sanctuary, and remained behind the others in order to intercept old Sam, the sexton, on his way to cover up till next Sabbath the moth-eaten upholstery of the pulpit.

Now Miss Gordon in her cracked old soprano could sing with fervour of the regard she felt for the "very dust" by the worshippers of Mount Zion, but that commodity was very far from being prized by her in Kildarragh Zion.

"Now see, Sam," she was directing, "that you go carefully with your duster over all the woodwork next Saturday that ledge, now, underneath the pulpit "

Sam agreed courteously. He would—he would most certainly obey her instructions, while adding defensively, "but sure I always do it."

And while the exacting lady and the negligent but anxious-to-please Sam discussed that tremendous subject of dust or no dust on the ledge underneath the pulpit, two human beings in strained silence, each conscious of a sense of something crucial impending, walked together out of the door of the old meeting-house and past the quiet graves of those whose hearts were forever healed.

Never had Eunice felt so drawn to this lost lover as on this last day, when it seemed to her possible they might never meet again. Speech seemed uncalled for, and even the usually blithe tongue of Eunice was spell-bound, while a startling thought flashed through her uneasy mind like a last effort of conscience to rescue her: Was this lover the one she really loved after all? But she banished it fiercely. She must pull herself together. The die was cast. No turning back now!

Aunt Matilda came panting up, and the absurd ceremony of hoisting her on the car began. Alice, already seated, held out a hand to pull up the stout lady, who had got the length of one foot on the step, while Mr. Gordon pushed behind till the second was persuaded to follow; finally Aunt Matilda flopped down heavily on her seat and signified to all that the feat was accomplished. And all this farce was being enacted while in the background Hugh held Eunice's cold hand, she

strangely submitting, and looked into the eyes that failed to meet his own because of the tears that misted them.

She sprang lightly to her seat between her father and Jim.

His master intimated to Patrick that he might proceed. Patrick gave the reins a tug and muttered "G'wan out of that, now," and the only too willing horse started briskly for home.

The minister stood bareheaded. As the car turned the corner Eunice raised her hand and smiled—a sad smile—he thought. Although he hardly comprehended it at the time, he recognized afterwards that it was a last sweet gesture of farewell.

As the slow hours dragged that Sabbath evening, Eunice became a prey to that poignant "last time" feeling. Her father slept, as usual, over his religious papers, letting them slip from his hands to the floor. Aunt Matilda frankly dozed as the life of the distinguished Dr. Cooke lay comfortably in her lap.

Tea over, Eunice, a prey to restlessness, slipped outside, and for the last time paced the familiar garden paths, while the friendly old trees stirred by the evening wind waved a farewell to her. Again and again her eyes rested on the old grey house, its walls hidden underneath climbing roses coming into bloom and sweet with fragrant white jasmine. Later on the Virginian creeper would turn those walls into flame, but she wouldn't see it. This was the home that she had come to regard as a prison, yet she now perceived only its safe motherliness and charm. The "monthly" roses that she could always count on finding, even on a winter

day, were now dear friends she was deserting for ever, or was it for ever?

Every hour of that night the Grandfather reminded her that the time was passing—passing—passing. At length when he gave five peremptory strokes she slipped quietly to the floor. She had taken the precaution the night before to leave her clothes and her luggage in the drawing-room, where she would dress and from which she intended to make her exit. The old boards creaked a protest beneath her stealthy footsteps as she went downstairs, and, dressing as silently as she could, she unlatched the side window that was to lead her to liberty. Alas! it also complained. Sliding her few belongings over the sill, she followed them and stood on the dewy lawn.

As she did so a sudden fright seized her. Towzer began to bark with that deep, full-throated note used for approaching danger. Trying not to hear, she ran swiftly out by the little side gate and down the hill to the cross-roads.

Yes, there he was, waiting. No time was wasted in greetings. He helped her on the car and sprang up beside her. The driver, who was evidently party to the conspiracy, whipped up his horse and away they dashed as if for "Gretna Green."

Towzer's persistent warning bark awoke his master, who very unwillingly rose and went to a back window overlooking the yard. Perhaps some early morning prowler was paying attention to the poultry—he remembered he had heard there were gypsies in the neighbourhood. But there appeared no sign of any-

thing unusual outside. Towzer had now changed his ferocious bark to a sorrowful whine at intervals. Mr. Gordon felt really angry with Towzer's conduct, and after commanding him to be quiet went back to bed—but not to sleep—for still Towzer lamented.

Alice was the last to come to breakfast and apologized for having slept in. "Eunice usually awakes me, and she wasn't in the room when I awoke; she must have been up early." It soon transpired to their bewilderment that no one, not even the servants, had set eyes on Eunice that morning.

Her father's face darkened. "Search the garden," he directed to no one in particular. Alice and Jim both ran round the empty paths, and in a short time everyone was satisfied that there was no Eunice about the place.

Mr. Gordon gulped down his tea, stuffed the last piece of toast in his mouth, and said: "Tell Patrick to put the mare in the car immediately." A very white-faced Alice was still searching inside and out, and Aunt Matilda had left the table in the middle of breakfast and collapsed crying into the nearest armchair.

Jim, hardly understanding why there was so much fuss over a non-present Eunice, thought: "I'll likely get a seat into Castleferran to school," ran eagerly to deliver the message to Patrick, and was seated on the car to await his father's arrival. Patrick had hardly time to pull on an old white waterproof coat over his "sleeved waistcoat" by way of livery by the time his master appeared. He asked: "Where till?"

"To Castleferran post office."

Arrived there, Mr. Gordon entered and enquired where "a man called Heskyn" lodged.

"Just in that house fernenst you," replied the post-mistress. Her curiosity was excited, and she watched from behind her counter what would follow.

At the imperative knock on the door of the house "fernenst" him Mr. Heskyn's landlady appeared, looking rather frightened when she grasped the identity of her early morning caller.

"Is this where Heskyn lodges?"

"It is, but he's gone."

"When will he be back?"

"He'll not be back; he's gone clean and clever."

"When did he go?"

"This very mornin', by the first train to Dublin."

"Could you oblige me with his address?"

"I could, surely, for he left it for me to forward any letters would come for him."

He copied it and thanked her.

"Drive as quickly as you can to Hightown Junction," he directed Patrick, "I must catch the mid-day train there to Dublin."

They managed it in the nick of time. The train was signalled and the clerk closing down the office window.

"A return to Dublin."

"What class?"

"Second."

For the first time in his life Mr. Gordon pocketed his change without counting it. The porter opened the door and slammed it after him, and he was away on that hideous pursuit with only his apprehensive thoughts for company. He had said to Patrick to tell Miss Gordon he might be home that night or he mightn't; in any case he would take a car from Hightown. He must get to Dublin. At once, at once, *at once,* the

wheels seemed to be shouting, at once, *at once, at once.* He must rescue his daughter *at once, at once, at once.*

Arriving at Amiens Street, he directed the jarvey to drive him to 7 Glenberg Street. The man, guessing from his Northern accent that he might not know the city well, drove him a round-about and finally drew up in a street of rather dismal middle-class houses, all identical.

Mr. Gordon told him to wait. Surely he would find Eunice, and she dare not refuse to come back with him. She must. He was not accustomed to be disobeyed. It was a mad prank of hers, a terribly foolish, wicked act, but when she saw her father she would come to her senses. He knocked loudly and confidently.

Heskyn himself, as he supposed him to be, opened the door.

"Is Miss Gordon within?" he demanded in a tone that had never failed to carry awe to the hearer.

Mr. Heskyn smiled as though amused. "No," he replied, "but Mrs. Heskyn is!"

CHAPTER XI.

MISS McGEORGE'S TEA-PARTY

One member of Kildarragh who was never absent, rain, snow or storm, was Miss McGeorge. The Church, that is, the particular one of her father's—for she never gave a thought to any other, except that in her subconscious mind lay a profound pity for those who belonged to other creeds and had not been born into the elect. The proceedings and welfare of the Presbyterian Church were to her as the breath of life.

Left young an orphan, she had been adopted and brought up by her father's brother, the Reverend Moses McGeorge, who, because he could not afford to marry for love, remained single and gave his heart to the small congregation over which he had been ordained. To them he was "guide, philosopher and friend."

Perhaps he had his recompense by the sacrifice. Love and respect had flowed out wholeheartedly to him not alone for the forty years that he had ministered to them, but remained a tradition long after his death. He was able to leave little of this world's goods to his niece, merely sufficient to buy a cottage with a garden attached and grazing for a cow. In this humble abode she resided with dignity, reliant on her cow and garden to provide what was necessary for earthly wants. Her real life consisted of the precious memories she retained of this beloved uncle, and which were a thoroughly satisfactory spiritual solace at all times.

By the Kildarragh congregation she was regarded as an eminently superior person, having received the benefit of the oft-quoted uncle's training and education.

To confess to limited means Miss McGeorge's pride was averse. Nevertheless it required self-denial known only to herself and God that she paid her stipend and sustentation, gave her half-crown on Foreign Mission Sunday, and subscribed to every good cause to which she was invited—the "cheerful" giver—thanking God for permitting her an opportunity to practise some deprivation for His sake. A better-off cousin, who lived in Belfast, supplied her with enough half-worn garments, rather too fashionable for Kildarragh needs. There was one draw-back, however, to this kindly-meant transaction. Miss McGeorge was considerably taller and stouter than this opulent cousin, with the rather ludicrous result that poor "Cousin Eliza" looked somewhat skittish in skirts reaching above her ankles. Still more awkward was it that buttons on bodices had to be coerced into the receptacles intended for them, and often, indeed, refused to be, while her breathing was rather restricted and her robust arms felt pinioned. No matter; Miss McGeorge thanked God for putting it into "Cousin Emily's" heart to remember her at all.

The one luxury she permitted herself was that of entertaining—the latter consisting of tea and conversation—she would have been shocked had it been termed gossip, for did it not revolve around godly ministers and their godly wives, or those that rumour said were likely to become their partners. Of course it was inevitable that some local unspiritual gossip should creep into their discussions in these gatherings.

On this particular evening Miss McGeorge was in her favourite fuss of preparing for invited guests, spreading her best tablecloth on the round table in the parlour and taking from the diamond-paned corner cupboard her grandmother's exquisite old blue china. Whilst her hands were busy her brain was also active, debating what she would wear. Only last week "Cousin Emma" had sent her a blue silk dress. If she wouldn't wear it now, when would she wear it? for it was too gay for even that distinguished annual occasion—the soirée at Kildarragh Meeting-house.

In good time she went into her little bedroom off the parlour to dress, and now one difficulty presented itself —the blue silk buttoned up the back!

After frantic efforts to achieve this operation she was forced, perspiring, to desist, murmuring: "I'll have to get Tommy to try and do it," Tommy being her juvenile servant-boy, who had taken office only the day before.

These "Tommies" followed one another in rather rapid succession, yet there remained ever an adequate supply at "The Union," remuneration there being fixed at a low figure, they, doubtless, being unaware of the value of their services.

Of the satisfactory future of each boy Miss McGeorge was incurably optimistic, and felt fully convinced that the incoming Tommy would compensate for the out-going one. Just at first she described him to enquiring friends as a "treasure," sometimes even "a perfect treasure"; gradually the description deteriorated till finally she was forced to admit that at the latter end it was a positive relief to get rid of him. Withal the incoming Tommy was for a short time "a real treasure."

The reigning Tommy was being initiated into his duties, such as driving the cow in from the field and driving her back again after being meanwhile surreptitiously milked by Miss McGeorge; carrying small cans of milk to the cow's customers; going messages to the village shop to procure bran for the pampered animal, yellow meal for the fowl, as well as any necessary sustenance needed for his mistress and himself.

He was also required to deal with the goat and the kid, and he contrived to snatch much amusement, in which the kid participated, her parent protesting from any like familiarity in deadly earnest. To change their orbit thrice daily, seeing to it that Miss McGeorge's hedges or anybody else's hedges were beyond their reach, that dainty being particularly agreeable to the goat palate. While not in actual attendance on his stock he was expected to dig and weed in the garden, from the products of which Miss McGeorge derived part of her income by selling the fruits and vegetables in their seasons.

Half-in and half-out of the blue silk dress, Miss McGeorge went to the back-door and called softly to the newest Tommy, who was engaged in the byre.

"Yus," came from the byre.

"Clean your feet well and come in."

Tommy rubbed his clogs along the "bottle" of straw that served as a door-mat and entered.

"I want you to button my back."

Tommy thought this a strange request, but he said agreeably, "Yus."

"Wash your hands first." Tommy did so.

She then presented her back to him. "Can you reach the top button? Better stand on the stool."

Tommy mounted the "creepie," pushed the shock of red hair from over his eyes, and applied himself earnestly to the unfamiliar task of filling up the gaps in the broad back before him. After a period of pushing and pulling and breathing hard on Miss McGeorge's neck, he announced: "They're all in now but one."

"That will have to do," said she, turning round, and continued: "I expect some friends for tea. You have yet to bring home the ducks off the flax-hole and shut them up for the night, and then lock the hen-house door, bring in sticks and leave them by the fire so that they will be dry for the morning, fill the crock with fresh water from the well, polish my shoes and your own. When you have all done you may read *The Christian Herald* till nine o'clock and then go to bed. When our tea is over I will give you your supper.

Tommy lent an obliging ear to all these instructions, and when Miss McGeorge had finished said "Yus" respectfully.

Somewhat handicapped by the pressure of the tight blue silk, Miss McGeorge was putting the finishing touches to her preparations when the first knock came.

"That's Mrs. McBriar," she said impatiently; "she's always before the time. These country people do not know that it is bad manners to be early." She shed her apron and went to the door. Yes, it was Mrs. McBriar and Christina. She succeeded in greeting them cordially and showed them into the spare bedroom to remove their headgear, in Mrs. McBriar's case a heavy black bonnet with broad strings tied in a neat bow under her chin, for Mrs. McBriar was actually over forty and perforce must give the appearance of a respectable matron that had already left any pretentions

to youth far behind. Christina, a vision of the freshness and radiance of youth, in a straw hat trimmed with pink roses, the very colour of her cheeks.

As Miss McGeorge sat talking to them she chaffed a little, giving half an ear to Mrs. McBriar's laments as to the conduct of the weather during the past week and the impossibility of getting clothes dried at all. She was grateful to hear the knocker again.

There was no doubt this time of the unqualified heartiness of the welcome. "Well, Susan, I'm so glad you were able to get away. Just leave your hat on the bed and go in and talk to Mrs. McBriar while I finish up in the kitchen before the others come. Oh! here they are," as she glanced out of the window and saw Miss Sharp and Mrs. Doule coming very slowly up the path, for Mrs. Doule was exceptionally old—in her ninetieth year. She wore a crêpe bonnet with long crêpe "weepers," although the late Mr. Doule had slept in Daffadilly Green for well-nigh thirty years. She bore the appearance of one resolved to be a widow to the end.

Had there been a Mrs. Adair she also would have been invited to the little company. Miss Matilda and Miss Eunice Gordon had frequently honoured Miss McGeorge with their presence at tea, but the only other Kildarragh inhabitant thought worthy to sit down with them was the minister.

Seated compactly around the table that seemed to have been made just to hold them, Miss McGeorge "asked a blessing." Poor and plain at times her own food might be, yet she never failed to thank God for it.

The toasted "bap," split and generously buttered, was offered first to Mrs. Doule by reason of her honour-

able age, and she politely lifted the upper half of one portion, whereupon she was urged to take "the double of the bap," and afterwards everyone followed her example.

Conversation commenced by a chorus of admiration for the grandmother's blue china. Miss Sharp remarked that it reminded her of a beautiful set owned by her Aunt Jane and that this aunt possessed also several more "old antiques" that were the envy of her relatives.

"And did she never slip you any, seeing you're her only niece?" asked Mrs. McBriar.

"No, not even one 'tote' of them."

Said Mrs. Doule: "I know her Aunt Jane well, and 'she's the one won't strip till she's goin' to bed.' The same lady has a good penny past her, for she was gatherin' all her days, for she was never one to sell her hen on a rainy day."

The guests passed from the shortcomings of relatives to praising the good things on the board. The tea was considered vastly improved by a contribution from Miss McGeorge's goat. "It richens the tea out of all knowin'," Mrs. Doule gave as her opinion. But Christina loathed it, and wished her hostess would leave the room for two minutes that she might pour it out of the window.

An eulogy of the jam followed, its consistency pronounced perfect. Miss McGeorge, although she tried not to show it, was gratified by enquiries as to the proportion of sugar, duration of boiling, etc.

"What I always say," affirmed Mrs. Doule, "is that you're never taken at a disshort if you've a good pot of jam in the cupboard."

"Our ones," complained Mrs. McBriar, "are terrible severe on the jam; but when I scold, the master'll say, 'Sure when we don't drink whiskey we must have something.'"

"Aye, Mrs. McBriar, you must have had somebody's blessing to get that good sober man," complimented Mrs. Doule. "Now in the old times that I remember, even godly elders and ministers—the best of them—could take their glass like the rest. My own father, who was an elder, would come home from fair or market right and hearty, but the way it affected him was to make him agreeable beyond anything; he would even carry the cat to her bed. Many's a time we laughed at him puttin' the cat to bed on them nights, an' sayin' to her, 'Pussy, I love you.'"

"Does the minister like jam, Miss Sharp?" asked Mrs. McBriar, "for I could give him a good pot or two."

Miss Sharp shook her head slowly and mysteriously and did not speak for a few minutes. The silence was ominous. Then she said tragically: "To tell you the truth, he doesn't seem to care what he eats at present, or if he eats anything at all. Of course—namin' no names—you all know what I mean."

They did. Grave headshakes followed, and every countenance took on a serious expression.

"I have a volume of pity for him," continued his housekeeper, "for I can see as plain as a pikestaff that he's just breaking his heart about her."

"Wasn't it semendable of her," pronounced Mrs. Doule, "an' her an elder's daughter, takin' up with a foreigner from dear knows where. They say he never darkened a church door when he was in Castleferran,

but went ferretin' on the Sabbath Day (more solemn headshakes), an', besides all that, he was the boy could smell the cork!"

"Indeed, sure enough," agreed Mrs. McBriar, "he was a celebrated sinner. The master heard it all when he would be through the countryside."

"But just wait till you hear this," said Mrs. Doule, impressively, nearing her climax: "Forby everything else, he was a blasphemer! I'm well acquainted with the woman where he lodged, an' I have this from her own lips. The very third night that he was in her house didn't he come home hardly fit to stand on his feet when she opened the door. 'Oh! Mr. Heskyn,' sez she, with a start, 'you're drunk,' for she was frightened of drunk men. And what does my boul' boy answer her? Says he, 'Thank God for it!'" (Shocked headshakes.)

"Can it be possible," said Miss McGeorge, "that her father was not aware of this clandestine acquaintanceship?"

"Now, who dare face up to tell him?" demanded Miss Sharp. "For me, I would as lief go into the lions' den with Daniel."

"Couldn't some one have reasoned with herself and given her an insight into this man's character? You, Susan, she showed great friendship to you."

Susan, clad in a gown that had once graced the subject of conversation, on being appealed to, had difficulty in keeping the tears back. "I loved Miss Eunice. She was always a good friend to me, but I could not make so free as to name it to her. I wish now I had. I would have died to save her."

"Yes," said Mrs. McBriar, "that's just the pity of it. She was so well liked. She was just as plain as she was grand."

"That's because she was a real lady," said Miss McGeorge, "and what I always say is, if you're not born a lady, nothing can make you one."

"As the master says," continued Mrs. McBriar, "she always knew you, whether you were dressed or not. He says he was comin' up Kildarragh hill one day in the cart when he overtook her, and she kept her hand on the cart to her own gate to keep up with him and talk to him."

"I think," said Christina, who had kept silent during this discussion on the event that had scandalized the countryside, "I think that people should marry them they want to. It's their own look-out. What do you say, Susan?"

"Only sometimes," said Susan, hesitatingly. "But Christians should only marry Christians. We're told that in the Bible."

"That's correct, Miss Stacey," corroborated Mrs. Doule, "but there's not a dale of Christians now to choose from. The good people, it seems to me, for the most part, is all dead."

"Oh! don't say that," Mrs. McBriar protested; "just look at Mr. and Mrs. Starritt in your own congregation."

"To be sure there's a few left, and, indeed, what Daffadilly would do wantin' them I don't know. He's a man in a million, and as the sayin' is, 'You always find her where you left her.' People's pleased to say that Mr. Lovekin's lazy, but it's the sister that's to blame. If he only proposes to visit a sick lady half-a-

mile away, she'll start with her 'Now don't exert yourself, Alexander; remember you are far from strong.' You all remember old Peggy McCardle. She was a sort of a terror with her tongue, and I think he kept clear of her. But one day she was surprised to get a visit from him. After making some enquiries about her health, he asked for a Bible and read a chapter. It happened to be that one that says: 'I was sick and ye visited me.' When he came to that she gives him a right slap on the knee with her hand, and shouts: 'Houl' on, now, Mr. Lovekin! How long is it since you were in this house?'"

"An' old John, the sexton, him an' the minister's well matched, for he leaves most of the cleaning to Mrs. Starritt too."

"But he's terrible agreeable," said Mrs. McBriar.

"He's all that," agreed Mrs. Doule; "he's the essence of dirty good nature. Only last month Mrs. Starritt got all the Daffadilly girls together and they scrubbed every seat and the very floor, and polished the lamps till they shone, and the copper collecting boxes till you could see to shave yourself in them."

"How Mrs. Starritt finds time for all her activities I don't know," remarked Miss McGeorge.

"You may say that," said Mrs. McBriar, "for she's just destroyed with visitors. Him and her would both mortify you with kindness."

Said Christina mischievously: "I suppose, Mrs. Doule, the ministers now aren't what they were like when you were young?"

But from this Susan dissented. "I allow," she affirmed loyally, "that our present man would compare with the best of them."

"He's a brave man, by all I hear," conceded the old lady, "but none of you mind the good old ones. I was reared under the Reverend Elijah McTurk, an' it would rejoice your heart to listen to him reddin' up the hearers. Going home the whole talk was about how such an' such a one got it that day, never taking it to themselves. No, I would rather have Mr. McTurk scoldin' me nor Mr. Lovekin praisin' me!"

Notwithstanding the copious flow of conversation all the guests had had two cups of tea (except Christina), the bap had disappeared and an "inroads" made in the plate of delectable scones. They were now showing their appreciation of the slimcake and the "sonsy" raisin cake baked in the Dutch oven, and their hostess was pressing on them a third cup, or at least "half-a-one," and looking into the teapot assured them there was plenty still there.

Mrs. McBriar willingly responded to the invitation, saying apologetically: "The master says I think it a sin to leave a drop in the teapot."

Mrs. Doule admitted she could take half-a-cup, remarking at the same time that the tea now-a-days was quite inferior to what she drank when she was young. They had then green tea that had a "body" in it. These remarks were the recognized prerogative of Mrs. Doule as a lady of eighty-nine years' experience of mundane matters.

Susan and Christina insisted on clearing away and washing-up, and after Miss McGeorge had supplied Tommy's needs and returned to the parlour she found the opportunity had been taken there to discuss Susan's affairs.

"They say," said Miss Sharp, in a whisper, while

Mrs. McBriar's and Mrs. Doule's heads were leant close, "they say that Gideon Blair has a notion of her again."

"Well," said Mrs. Doule, "he's a poor percurious creature. What do you think, but he used to come regular once a week just to get a read of my *Christian Herald,* an' I was so provoked that when I got to see him comin' I hid it."

"But do you know," persisted Miss Sharp, "that there's another party making advances to her too?"

"Samuel Nethercote?" they whispered back. All had guessed it.

"That would be out of the frying-pan into the fire," declared Miss Sharp, "for Susan to get such a mother-in-law. No servant will stay long with her, she requires such attendance and has such a temper. The temper was in the family, for her sister had it too; but she tried to conquer it, for when she would feel it comin' on she would go away an' make a feather bed."

"All she ever would do for anybody would be with the wind of her mouth. Every time in my life I met her she asked me for tea, but she never named an evening; it was always to be when the throng went by."

"After I was married, twenty-two years ago," contributed Mrs. McBriar, "the master and I were to go to tea with her when the throng went by, but seemingly it's not past yet."

Said Miss Sharp: "But I caught her nicely and got the cup of tea. The last time I went to see her I sat a brave while till she thought it was time I was going, and said she: 'I suppose if I made a cup of tea you wouldn't take it?' Said I: 'Indeed I would, I would just love a cup.' I'm sure she was flabbergasted when I said it, but I got the cup of tea anyway."

"Wasn't it wonderful how she came round that last time she was so ill?" remarked Mrs. Doule. "Even after she had been prayed for in meeting she recovered. There's some people hard to kill!"

"It's because the devil hasn't room for her," adjudged Miss Sharp. "No, nobody'll ever lick many plates in Mrs. Nethercote's."

The door opened and Susan and Christina entered. Suddenly the conversation had changed. Evidently they had been discussing shopping, for Miss Sharp was saying: "I have bought the making of a dress in Wallace's. It's the cheapest shop in Castleferran. They charge too much at the 'Emporium.' Besides, I would rather leave my money with a Presbyterian."

"I didn't know before that Wallace was a Presbyterian," said Mrs. Doule.

"Oh! he's a wicked Presbyterian," Miss Sharp assured her.

Said Mrs. Doule: "There's no such thing as good stuff now-a-days. In my young days your wedding dress lasted you your lifetime for a good one, and did for weddings and christenings and soirées. Now people get a new dress nearly every year."

They next discussed the new minister of 1st Castleferran. He was terribly advanced and wished to introduce innovations. Actually spoke of having hymns in public worship!

Mrs. Doule held up her hands in horror. "Surely the General Assembly would interfere?" she said, "if he ever contrived such an action."

Said Miss McGeorge: "The Assembly is divided in opinion on that subject and, it is thought, will soon give liberty in the matter."

Mrs. Doule thanked God that she would then be in her grave.

"Well," declared Miss Sharp, "there's one man will never vote for liberty, and that's the Reverend Sturrock."

"He's nearly the last of the good old sort, and knows how to rule his congregation," approved Mrs. Doule.

"He can," agreed Miss Sharp, "but he can't rule that daughter of his. She's not amenable to him at all. He thinks the sun rises and sets in her. He would just deave you talkin' about 'Fanny.' Miss Fanny takes the stipend and sustentation when it comes in, and locks them up, and when he's going into Castleferran she'll give him a shilling, and he'll say, 'Fanny, make it two.'"

Said Miss McGeorge: "It's because he cannot be trusted with money. He would give it to the first person he met who would make a poor mouth to him. They tell a story about him that, one day getting off the train at Hightown with his bag, and looking around for Alick, who was to meet him, a ragged urchin accosted him. 'Carry your bag, sir?' he demanded. 'No, thank you,' said Mr. Sturrock, 'for my pockets are empty; I haven't even one penny.' 'Carry your bag to the poorhouse?' said the little rascal"

Mrs. McBriar now, after consulting the Grandfather gave an exclamation: "Dear a dear! it's time we took the road, Christina. The master doesn't like us to be out after elders' hours, Miss McGeorge."

Her hostess, according to etiquette, assured her it was quite early yet. She didn't go to bed early, but preferred to read a good book before retiring.

"And you are not nervous at night in this lonely place, are you?"

Miss McGeorge smiled at such a suggestion. "No, not the least," she said. "The last thing before getting into bed I repeat the One Hundred and Twenty-first Psalm, and," she repeated as her face glowed at the words, "'He that keepeth thee neither slumbers nor sleeps.'"

Mrs. Doule nodded warm approval. "That's better than barrin' the door," she approved.

Their hostess, as she opened the door to the cool night air, expressed the hope that they were all well "happed-up." They each one thanked her for the very pleasant evening she had given them and told her how much they had enjoyed it.

"And, Miss McGeorge," isn't it funny to think we're every one elders' daughters," said Miss Sharp.

And Mrs. Doule made the last sagacious comment: "There's nothing like a bit of dacency behind," she said.

Mrs. McBriar changed the subject. "I see you have got a new servant-boy, Miss McGeorge. How is he shapin'?"

"Splendidly. I think he will prove quite a treasure. He is a Presbyterian, and I liked his appearance when I saw him among the other boys."

"Aye," commented the old lady, "what I always say is that there's always something respectable looking about Presbyterians."

"Your last didn't turn out too well?" surmised Mrs. McBriar.

"Far from it, indeed," confessed his late mistress.

"latterly I could not trust him out of my sight. If I sent him a message I would wait for his return till I could do so no longer. Then I was obliged to put on my bonnet and go out and look for him."

"And where would you find him?" pursued Mrs. McBriar.

"Often playing marbles on the public road with boys whom I had forbidden him to associate with. And last week I found him on Andy Felan's poor old broken-winded horse galloping it round and round the field, while the basket containing our provisions was left on the footpath. I had directed him to get two salt herrings for our dinner (they're tasty of an odd time), and when I lifted the basket I could see no sign of them. Just then I observed a large grey cat eating something behind the hedge. On looking closer I saw it was our two herrings!"

The listeners shook sympathetic heads. Christina laughed. "Poor pussy," she said, "she would need to come home by our river for a drink after that feast."

CHAPTER XII.

THE McBRIARS VISIT A MANSE

Mrs. McBriar set extraordinary store by the fact that she had a cousin married to a minister, and the proudest day of her year was that on which she and her family set forth to visit the Reverend Samuel Tinkler and his worthy helpmeet, Julia.

It was rather a formidable undertaking—thirteen miles each way—seated on the family jaunting car, so that a good portion of the day was necessarily spent on the road.

This year, however, they were to accomplish the journey in greater state, for, yielding to much persuasion, especially from their oldest child, Bob, John McBriar had purchased a "trap"—a high creation—that was considered by the entire McBriar household the acme of smartness.

Having mounted it (with aid) Mrs. McBriar felt of more importance than ever she had before as she sat glancing downwards at her beaded dolman over her black silk dress, the latter held high for protection and revealing an elaborately "flowered" white petticoat that she had worn on her wedding day, and her costume completed with a lace collar fastened by her mother's large cameo brooch, which only saw the light of day on special occasions. Surmounting her still fresh-coloured countenance was a bonnet having purple flowers in front and tied with broad ribbon in a neat bow under her chin. She wore elastic-sided boots and white stock-

ings, and congratulated herself that she would not disgrace "Cousin Julia" and a manse.

Beside her sat the two little girls in stiffly starched white dresses, white home-knit cotton stockings and elastic-sided boots. Over their frocks were worn capes for their long drive.

Mr. McBriar hoisted himself up opposite, beside Bob, who drove, and all experienced a thrill of pride as they turned out of their "loanin'" in style and on to the broad road.

"I hope you'll not be too lonely, Christina," her mother had said anxiously, as Christina stood on the "street" to see them off.

"No, not one bit," Christina had assured her, "and don't be in any hurry home. Make a day of it when you are out."

Still Mrs. McBriar did not look satisfied as they moved away. "I'm a bit uneasy about leavin' her her lone, an' Peter away too. I wish I had got Susan Stacey to stay with her. What if a tramp come now! "

"If he did Roger would have a word to say to him," reminded her husband. "Och, woman dear, give over, an' give yourself peace an' enjoy yourself once in a while."

Indeed on that sweet early Summer morning, set free from four walls and a roof, and just to "stand and stare" at God's entrancing handiwork was in truth enjoyment sufficient. To look on the world's new green raiment, as yet unspoiled by dusty wear, and to gaze on the snowy masses of clouds drifting over a cerulean expanse of sky as though they themselves were bent on a day's frolic; just to feel the pure soft breeze caressing cheek and brow as you moved forward to meet it, these

all combined to draw the heart upwards in close touch with the Infinite.

Yet it was not by these charms of nature that the elder's senses were thrilled. The sky was the last place that he thought of looking for beauty. It had its use, of course, in foretelling whether atmospheric conditions were favourable or forbidding for his impending plans. To him the aspect that appealed most lay under his feet. What was of most interest and importance to him on his journey was the condition of the hay crop, the height of the "braird" of green corn showing above the ground, the portents of the potato crop, while a field of flax stirred him to excitement.

So they went happily on their way, and on encountering a stiff hill Mr. McBriar and Bob would dismount, mercifully, glad enough to stretch their limbs while the horse jogged sagaciously from side to side in as leisurely a way as he could.

Their destination was a remote manse attached to a small congregation on the extreme boundary of the Castleferran Presbytery—the very heart of the country, and a few miles from the nearest town. Adjacent to the church and manse were a school-house and a burying-ground strangely situated on top of a high hill. Sanctuary, school, cemetery—the three requisites of civilized mankind.

On passing through towns and villages on their way, instead of crops the elder descanted on the different churches of his own brand and the reputation of their ministers. "That is where the Reverend Sturkey preaches—a poor enough hand at the preachin', but a grand visitor." Another was a "brave preacher, but no visitor"—one of his hearers had told him that the man

had never yet "opened a book" in his house. And so on. He was familiar with the reputed virtues and shortcomings of one and all.

They were now approaching their goal, and all were glad. "I'm as stiff as the poker," complained Mrs. McBriar, "an' the dear only knows how I'm ever to reach the ground again."

Feeling comfortably happy that their travelling was almost over, and warmed by the thoughts of the welcome and the good dinner that awaited them, a devastating adventure sprang on them suddenly out of the blue!

They had guessed that it must be Fair Day in Moneymoyle, judging by the number of cows, calves and "stirks" they had passed in the last hour, their owners trudging wearily behind armed with sticks to prevent the perverse creatures from straying up "loanens," or persuade them to take the right turning at cross-roads.

One cow in particular, with an escort of three individuals, drivers and driven all struggling across the road, caused Bob some anxious manoeuvring to get past. As he eventually made a dash to get clear, one of her escort, not too steady on his feet, narrowly escaped being upset by the audacious high vehicle, and he, resenting the indignity, gave the passing offending object an indignant whack with his stick. In an instant Bob, feeling enraged, pulled up, threw the reins to his father and was over the wheel toweringly angry.

"I'll make you pay for that," he shouted.

"Will ye, indeed? I'm a better man nor you. Come on, I'll fight ye," and proceeded to take off his coat.

To his mother's unspeakable horror she saw Bob throw off his coat also and square his fists. Her

next shock was immeasurably greater. Her husband threw the reins at her trembling hands, and also his coat, disappeared over the wheel, and, could she believe her eyes? he, too, was squaring his fists in an uncommonly workmanlike manner. This was a new experience of him and one that terrified her.

They were two against three, but two sober. Bob soon made short work of his challenger, stretched him on the ditch in no time, proceeded to give him a good pommelling and left him there helpless. Then he turned quickly to help his father with the others, one of whom, an elderly man, kept brandishing a stout stick dangerously, until Mr. McBriar and he succeeded in wrenching it out of his hand.

The third man seemed to be trying to separate the combatants.

All this episode Mrs. McBriar watched fascinated. Never in her life had she been the victim of such emotions, while her powerless hands on the reins permitted the horse to do what he liked, which was to go dead slow, tired as he was. Nellie and Agnes contributed loud crying as a chorus to the drama, and their mother glanced enviously at the placid cow quite evidently pleased to seize this fortunate interlude to snatch a bite or two of the succulent growth of the shough without being pounded and told to "g'wan." She didn't care they were one and all killed.

Mrs. McBriar's thoughts raced as quickly as her heart. She had got the length of seeing her husband or son or both carried to the manse on a stretcher, one or other or both dead, for that man with the stick was certain to hit her husband on the head, and, in fact, did so as she witnessed. This was awful to contemplate,

but her excited imagination bounded still further. She saw a gallows tree on which her husband or son or both were hanged for murder! She was sure the man lying at full length on the ditch was dead, for he had not stirred hand or foot, while the old man they were using so roughly in order to gain possession of the stick might well collapse at any moment and die of shock. To her the whole thing was a prolonged agony, but in reality it only occupied a few minutes. To her unspeakable relief she saw her husband help the man on the road to his feet; the prostrate one on the ditch came to life and with some help stood up, and she realized there was a parley at which she stopped to listen.

Bob was demanding the name and address of the aggressor who, he asserted, had caused damage to the trap. The truculent one refused to give either.

"All I'll tell you is that I'm a good Presbyterian, an' sit under the Reverend Tinkler. Will that satisfy ye?"

"That's just where we're going to visit now," the elder informed him.

"For any sake don't tell him about this wee bit of sparrin', for he keeps aye at me to sign the pledge."

"Why don't you do it, then, an' learn to conduct yourself on the public road," said Mr. McBriar.

"There's no call for it. Barrin' an odd time, I never touch it from one fair day till another. Mebbe you're a Presbyterian yourself?"

"I am," said the elder, "to the backbone."

"That's right," commended the tipsy one; "isn't it a pity there's not more of them!"

He then extended a large dirty hand to Mr. McBriar and afterwards to Bob, who refused to touch it. In-

stead he threatened: "I'll summons you for the injury to the trap."

"We'll let it pass, Bob," urged his father, "it would only annoy Mr. Tinkler, an' we'll not let on to anybody about the whole affair."

"I'll not let on either," said the magnanimous offender, "but I'm a bit sore for all that. That young fellar can box, so he can."

So they parted. The other combatants shook hands, and the conquerors hurried after the trap.

Mrs. McBriar's countenance was sadly altered from what it was when she set out and stained by tears. "That was awful," she greeted them; "I thought I would have died of fright."

Her men-folk laughed at her. But all agreed that there should be no mention of the incident at the manse. "It would be a terrible affront to the Reverend Tinkler," asserted Mrs. McBriar, "that his wife's cousins, an' one of them an elder, too, had been fighting his hearers near his own gate. It was most disrespectable, and, indeed, it was sinful, an' all I can say is," she commented, "that I hope and pray it will never reach the ears of the Kildarragh congregation!"

"Wipe your face, woman dear, and don't arrive at the manse lookin' as if you had lost every friend you had in the world."

"You look a little pale, Sarah," sympathized Mrs. Tinkler, after extending to them all a warm welcome; "it's likely the heat. Are you sure you're quite well?"

"Nothin' ails her," interposed the elder, "but old age settin' in."

Dinner was awaiting them, and Mrs. McBriar's cheeks soon regained their customary bloom in that pleasant, open-hearted manse atmosphere.

Rosy Tinkler children there were in plenty around the board, clothed and fed Providence knew how, but learning early life's best lesson—"the secret of doing without." Home-baked bread, never butter and jam together, potatoes and vegetables from their own garden and field, porridge and "worship" to begin the day, and "worship" to end it. If ever the proud possessors of a penny, they had earned it by weeding or pulling fruit, or other useful stunts. "Shanks' mare" their mode of travelling. The minister himself used it on the hilly length and breadth of his scattered congregation, and was loved for his "good visiting."

The two eldest boys walked the five miles there and back to school in Moneymoyle, their father coaching them in their Latin and Greek in the evenings, and their mother teaching the little girls who were old enough music and French. Such was the Spartan upbringing in Ulster manses well-nigh two generations ago that sent forth healthy, clever youths to capture high positions in the world and to adorn them.

Dinner was invariably followed by a walk round the manse domain, ending by a visit paid to the cemetery —a fine climb—when the minister would remark jokingly that perhaps some of its inhabitants were as near Heaven as they would ever be!

But the chief entertainment of the day, in Mrs. McBriar's estimation, consisted in her being shown over the entire house. To-day she lingered longest in her hostess's bedroom, where a new outfit of her cousin's, to be worn at the Assembly, was displayed.

"It's a lovely dress, Julia, and a serviceable colour. too, and the bonnet matches it—put it on till I see it," and Julia smoothed her already greying hair under the new headgear and turned to Mrs. McBriar for approval.

"It becomes you queer an' well, Julia."

"You see," her cousin said, "I had not had anything new for three years. But James insisted on me going to the Assembly this year, as the supplemental dividend is up two pounds, and he said I must get new clothes for it. 'The very hens in your own yard get a new suit every year, and when did you get anything?' he argued. And I said: 'What about yourself?' And he said, according to Scripture he was only allowed one coat and, besides, his never went out of fashion.

"'No,' I told him; 'it only gets a bit greener every year.'

"I have not been at the Assembly since just after we were married—sometimes even James can't afford to go. It's hard enough to keep the children in shoes alone. I don't know how it's done, but James says that 'a poor minister's money goes farther than any other person's.'"

"Aye, indeed, Julia," agreed Mrs. McBriar, "if it's little I'm sure there's a blessing with it, and I'm right glad you're gettin' this wee holiday. I never was at the Assembly myself, nor ever hope to be, but it must be a wonderful sight to see so many ministers all gathered together in one place; it must just be like Heaven.

Having seen her family safely off, Christina ran with a light step and still lighter heart back into the house

and attacked her household duties with well-nigh ferocity, washed up the dishes, scalded the milk vessels, fed the calves and various families of chicks, swept and tidied the kitchen and made the beds, after which orgy of housekeeping she sat down hot and flushed but with shining eyes to a cup of tea that was to serve for dinner Having despatched it quickly she ran up to her room, changed her dress for the blue one that Archie always said matched her eyes, and plaited the golden hair around her head like a coronet. Then, gazing intently into her looking-glass, Christina smiled to her reflection and said to it: "I think you'll do."

He would hardly have time to be here yet, but she was ready for him. She loved him, oh! how more than tongue could tell. No one before had ever loved as they did. She was his alone and for ever.

Taking up her knitting—for Christina had been taught that it was sinful to sit with folded hands save on the Sabbath Day—she seated herself in the "summer-house" to wait for him, and watched the giddy butterflies flitting hither and thither in an ecstasy of being alive their brief span, and the honey bees burying themselves deep in some particularly delicious bloom drinking its nectar. Bees and butterflies were, like herself, making the most of that heavenly day. And what an enchanting day it was! Surely Heaven itself could scarcely surpass it. So ruminating happily she fell into a soothing reverie, her eyelids closed, the knitting fell from her hands.

She dreamed that a butterfly in its flight had brushed her cheek, and languidly opened her eyes. Ah! Archie himself was the butterfly. There he stood, so tall, so captivating, looking down at her with those melting

brown eyes of his. With his wide humorous mouth and "irregular" features, Archie was anything but handsome, but to Christina never had he looked so irresistible. He sat down by her side and the knitting fell unnoticed to the ground.

After a lengthened period of love-making Christina all at once became serious. "If father saw us now, Archie, I don't know what would happen," she said.

"He'll have to come round yet, Christina, if we just stick to each other an' he sees that nothin' can change us. If only I had a bit of lan', now he thinks a power o' that."

"Oh! how I wish you had a farm, Archie. What about your old uncle that said you were to come after him?"

"He's hale an' hearty yet. I'm just tired waitin' on people dyin'."

"But I would wait for you till I was grey-haired, Archie."

We'll not wait that long, Christina. Lately I have a notion of tryin' Belfast. I've a cousin on the 'Island,' and he might help me to get a job there. I'm a brave carpenter, you know."

Startled, she clung to him and hid her face against his coat. "Archie, love, I can't bear to think of you goin' away." Then in a minute she lifted her head and looked up at him. "I oughtn't to say that, Archie, if you think you can better yourself I should be the last to keep you back."

"You'll always be true to me, Christina, no matter where I go?"

"Always, Archie, always."

"There's a sough goin' through the country that oul'

Mr. Jefferson has his eye on you," said Archie mischievously; "doesn't he come to the house? Mebbe you'll leave me for him after all, for he has lashin's of money."

"He comes of an odd Sunday evenin' an' just cracks with father about ministers an' meetin's an' the like of that."

But Archie noticed that her face grew suddenly serious. "I can't bear you to make a joke like that—I would rather die," she said, "nor take an old fellow like that for his money."

Just then the sun disappeared behind a cloud and there was a strange silence as though a premonition of some disaster awaiting them.

But very soon the sun came out again, and Christina roused herself and boldly affected cheerfulness.

"Look, Archie, at the butterflies enjoying the present moment! Let us be butterflies too. Come down to the meadow an' we'll walk beside the river."

The meadow lay bathed in sunshine. The river sparkled as it rushed over pebbles and hurried round boulders, singing to itself as though it joined in the rapture of that glorious day.

The river had always been the happy hunting-ground of McBriar childhood, especially of Christina, and still continued to be to her a dear friend. When she felt happy it seemed to respond gaily to her mood, but when sunk in fits of girlish depression she noted that it looked dark and mysterious as though sympathizing with her fancied girlish griefs.

At times when Christina was wanted and failed to be found, her mother would suggest: "Try the meadow, for she wastes a semendable dale of time look-

in' at that piece of water—what for I'm sure I don't know."

Now she and Archie paced its banks, his arm around her, her head on his shoulder, where it just reached. And the river gurgled understandingly as it flowed past.

Suddenly Christina raised her head and looked into her lover's eyes. "Oh! Archie, I am afraid. We're too happy. I never feel like this, but something happens to make me wish I was dead."

"It's not fair of you to say that, Christina, an' me lovin' you the way I do."

"Forgive me, Archie; sure as long as you love me nothing awful could happen me."

"Nothin' in the world," he assured her.

The hours flew as they always do when you wish them to linger. "I must soon be goin'," he reminded her.

"Come up to the house an' we'll have tea first. If mother only knew it was left so long without anybody she would never go away a day again," she laughed.

They sauntered up the hill and through the orchard, and contrary to Mrs. McBriar's fixed belief that some cataclysm would take place if left by itself in such circumstances, they found the kitchen precisely in the same condition as Christina had left it two hours before.

Another sweet half-hour passed sitting at the tea-table by the wide west window, through which the roses that climbed the wall outside nodded knowingly to them.

"This is what it will be like always when we're married, Christina."

She sighed. "Whiles it comes over me that that may never be."

"We must, we must, Christina, surely."

She left him the "shortcut" across the fields to his own road, and when that was reached they stood a long time unable to part. Passers-by gave them "time o' day," the elder ones indulgently reflecting on the foolishness of youth, the younger regarding this charming idyll rather enviously.

After watching Archie till out of sight, he looking back lovingly again and again, Christina ran home as fast as she could, found once more the kitchen intact, and threw herself again into work, for there was a deal to do yet before her family returned. First of all she cleared the tell-tale tea-table, next she fed the starving chickens and the indignant hens kept waiting so long for supper. She then drove the cows in from the field, milked them, and escorted them back to spend a luxurious night in the dewy grass, chewing the cud of content without regrets for the past or fears for the future. Lastly she attended to the wants of the impatient calves, and while they were still licking their buckets so that not even the flavour might be lost, she heard the sound of wheels turning into the loanin', and before the trap had reached the door she came out to welcome the travellers, knitting in hand.

Mrs. McBriar was full of apologies. "We came just as soon as ever we could get away. I was frettin' all day, Christina, about you being your lone so long. Is Peter never home yet? You must have been terrible lonesome."

"No, not a bit," Christina assured her truthfully, adding, "I was busy."

"Did you feed the calves?" enquired her father.

"I did. Everything's done, I think."

"You might turn out a brave housekeeper yet," he joked, and Christina managed to look innocently pleased at the commendation.

"I wish you'd put somethin' coolin' on my head, for it burns like fire."

"Why, what's wrong with it?" asked Christina.

"So well you might say," interposed her mother, shaking her head solemnly. "Would you believe it, but your father was fightin' like a madman on the public road? an' Bob, too—the pair of them."

Christina looked horrified, while her mother continued: "I'm married to you, John McBriar, twenty-two years come Michaelmas, an' seemingly I don't know you yet. An' you an elder, too!"

"It was thon stick done the damage, and my shoulder's got wrenched, too, pullin' it from him. Dear but they both smarted the whole day. I could hardly get my cup up to my mouth." And while Christina washed and dressed the wound on his head and rubbed his shoulder with "goose-seam" Mrs. McBriar described the battle in picturesque detail.

Bob came in from stabling the horse and seeing that everything was all right for the night.

"My thumb must be out of joint," he announced. "I wish you would put a bandage round it, for I can't use it at all, an' it's swelled a good bit."

These matters attended to, the elder called for "the Book," read the chapter and offered up the prayer that he used with little variety every night, except that on this occasion he thanked the Lord for "journeying mercies."

Having risen more stiffly than usual from his knees, he made straight for bed, there to sleep the deep sleep of the just man who has been out most of the day in the open air. Bob followed, and the little girls also, already half asleep.

"I'm tireder nor if I had done two days' work, declared Mrs. McBriar, but she was not too exhausted to relate for Christina's benefit the entire events of the day, and once more pictured the appalling conflict that she said she thought at the time would kill her dead.

From that she passed to pleasanter topics—what they had for dinner (she had brought home the recipe for the grand sultana pudding), enumerated the varieties of bread and scones for tea, as well as a lovely sponge-cake—all baked by Cousin Julia. She next dwelt on the improvements in the house. Cousin Julia had turned the drawing-room carpet and put the middle to the outside—but, indeed, it was all well-worn, for they had had it since they were married. She had also got new curtains for the sitting-room, and hung the darned ones upstairs. Lastly she depicted with extra gusto Cousin Julia's new outfit for herself that was to grace the Assembly, and described it minutely.

Christina feigned interest. "The 'steepens' must be up," she remarked.

"Somethin's up," said her mother, "I forget what they call it, for my eyes are closin' with sleep."

On all but one of the household slumbers descended swiftly, and she lay awake from pure happiness, yet praying withal that she might not be punished for encouraging such an indulgence, thus betraying her inheritance from long-gone Puritan forefathers.

CHAPTER XIII.

PROPOSALS.

Gideon Blair laid his plans carefully. He would attend the prayer meeting in Ezra McWha's, escort Susan home, and on the way "make her the offer," as he grandiloquently termed it.

Susan, he knew, would certainly be there, not alone to lead the singing, but long beforehand to "redd up" the kitchen for Mrs. McWha, and make other necessary preparations, such as polishing up the tall brass candlesticks, fix candles in them, and place them on the small table, behind which the minister stood. She would also carry chairs from neighbouring houses to seat the little band of hearers.

Everything, Gideon reflected, would be in order in Susan's capable hands, for there was no doubt she was a by-ordinary woman, and he now knew she was the proper person to succeed Deborah as wife and housekeeper. He couldn't be too thankful that he had been Divinely guided to choose her. Maybe when they were married he would ask Mr. Adair to conduct a prayer meeting an odd time in his house too. It would not be much expense—just a little extra light and fire—and it would show that you prized the preaching of the Gospel. There must soon be an election of elders in Kildarragh. Mr. Gordon was failing—and surely he could not be passed over.

Gideon felt quite elated as he washed and shaved, and donned his second-best coat over his corduroy trousers.

He considered himself quite suitably attired for a week-day prayer meeting. His toilet completed, he took stock of himself in the cracked looking-glass hanging over the scullery sink, that did not quite show him all his broad, fat face at once, but he appeared entirely satisfied with what it reflected. "I'm not a bad-lookin' oul' fella at all; I clean up well," he complimented himself.

He arrived slightly late. The psalm had just concluded, and the minister was lifting his hand to signify prayer. However, before closing his eyes, Gideon took in the situation, and it altogether pleased him. He had rightly conjectured that Susan would have no embarrassing youngsters at her tails—they would be occupied over their lessons. But what gratified him especially was to note that Samuel Nethercote was not of the little company of worshippers. He took these omens to be a sign that Divine aid was still being vouchsafed him; certainly the way was being cleared before him for the carrying-out of his foreseen intentions.

He did honestly endeavour to follow the minister's petitions, yet his thoughts outran them as he pictured Susan's delight and gratitude at the honour he was about to confer on her in becoming the second Mrs. Gideon Blair—a prospect such as she never could have anticipated.

He congratulated himself that she would make him a docile, obedient wife, careful in all things, he was certain. This comforting knowledge was pleasant to him, though at times the thought that she could contribute nothing to his worldly possessions crept in and rankled. She would, however, compensate for that failing in other ways—there would be no waste, she

had been accustomed to a life of deprivation since Thomas's marriage—no putting three eggs in one cake with her; she would cheerfully practise abstemious living.

The fortunate object of his schemes, oblivious to the dazzling future that was being mapped out for her across the kitchen floor, was also, strange to say, not entirely absorbed in the opening prayer, being occupied with supplications of her own. "God help my dear Miss Eunice, for she was always good to me, and she has allied herself with a drunkard, a Sabbath-breaker, a heathen." The tears splashed through the fingers she held over her face and fell on the Bible on her knee. "I would have given my life to have saved her I might have tried, anyway. Oh! God forgive me for not trying."

As she listened, full of sympathy and pity for him also, to the minister's address, her tears again blinded her. He spoke of the sufferings common to this present world, which were as nothing to the glory that shall afterwards be revealed to us; doubtless in endeavouring to impart help and comfort to his listeners, he in some measure derived a portion for himself.

That humble kitchen presented the appearance of a peaceful haven in a storm-tossed world. The candles cast a flickering light over Mrs. McWha's white goffered cap as she sat in the front row beside her aged husband, and over Ezra's white hair, as he held a shaking hand behind his ear, that he might catch at least some of the precious words. There were other old folk also present who could no longer "travel" to Kildarragh on Sundays, and were gladly availing themselves of an opportunity to hear once more "the

old, old story," and catch a glimpse of the Heavenly vision that they would soon necessarily behold in all its inconceivable splendour. Confidently they joined in the concluding paraphrase :—

Father of peace and God of love,
We own Thy power to save,
That power by which our Shepherd rose
Victorious o'er the grave.

And Susan's vibrant voice leading them on thrilled Gideon as never before, re-awakening in him the lost flame of his youth that he had purposely quenched so long ago, but which had now flamed up with an added intensity that astonished him.

Friendly greetings were exchanged after the Benediction, and the "two or three," for whom our Lord promises a special blessing, dispersed, quickened and comforted, realizing more and more "the peace that passeth all understanding" in their often perplexed lives.

Gideon boldly attached himself to Susan, and enquired kindly after Thomas's "brownkatus."

"It has nearly left him, thank God!" Susan replied.

"That's a good job. Didn't Mr. Adair give us a fine discourse; but I thought he didn't look too well. He would be better married. You soon tire of housekeepers, and forbye the expense and waste, you want somebody of your own."

Susan remained silent. Like a shot she sensed something ominous in the turn the conversation had taken, and, unconsciously quickening her step, she felt herself wishing she was nearer home.

"Shusan." His tone left her no doubt that her premonitions were correct. "I've something very particular to say to you. You'd hardly know it, but I've been studyin' this while back to get married again. I have made my choice prayerfully, and you'll be surprised to hear that the Lord has directed me to you."

Gideon paused to receive a rapturous response, or at least look, at the wonderful offer, but Susan's face was inscrutable.

"Fifteen or more years back I was thinkin' strong of you, and then Deborah crossed my path. I liked her well, for she didn't come empty handed, and she turned out an obedient, thrifty wife. If she had lived I would never have thought of marryin' again, but the Lord seen fit to take her from me, an' she was well prepared to go, an' now, her bein' gone, my heart returns to you, an' I have planned that we might have the 'big day' when the throng of the harvest is by—for marryin' does interfere with your work. Will you be ready by then?"

Susan did not reply, but her step got quicker and quicker, so that Gideon found it a little difficult to keep up with her. She felt urged "to take to her heels and run."

But Gideon went on undaunted. Susan was shy and. of course, modest, as she should be.

"I know there's quilts an' household stuff of that sort you would like to bring with you; but I'm sure you have them past you, for you're a good sewer an' a thrifty, well-doin' girl an' a credit to them that rared you. So just as soon as a slack time comes roun' we'll speak to Mr. Adair an' get the knot tied."

He stopped.

It was quite a lengthy proposal, made eloquently and confidently throughout without hesitation or doubt.

Alas! it fell on unappreciative ears. Poor flustered Susan had made many futile attempts, which he misunderstood, to stop his oration. When at length he had apparently finished and waited to receive her grateful acceptance, she managed to say in a low but distinct voice: "I thank you, Gideon, for your kind offer to me, but I cannot accept it."

Gideon felt by no means repulsed by her sincere avowal.

"To be sure," he hastened to assure her, "I know well what's on your mind, an' I respect you all the more for it—that you have no fortune—isn't that it? But, woman, dear, I'll overlook all that. The reason I'm asking *you* is because you are a good, careful, Christian girl, an' forby that, the likin' I had for you when I was young is powerful in me again."

Susan looked at him for the first time, and said earnestly: "Gideon, you'll please me best by sayin' nothin' more about the matter. I never was one wanted to be married, an' I'll never leave my own ones now. I'm content as I am, mebbe more nor them that is married." Susan waxed bolder as she proceeded, and ended with decided finality: "An' I wouldn't change my way of livin' for any mortyal man."

It took some minutes for this astounding declaration to penetrate Gideon's self-complacency. Was it actually possible that she might be refusin' him? Not at all! She would be mad to do a thing like that. It was just the way women had of pretendin'. He knew all about them.

So he went on to specify the allurements of the position she would be so fortunate to occupy. "You'll never have to work out-bye again (barrin' of a big throng), an' of course you'll get to meetin' as regular as ever, for them that doesn't worship their Maker on His appointed day, well, I wouldn't like to be in their shoes at the comin' judgment! An', as you know, mebbe I have a brave bit of money past me—mebbe more nor the people think," and he winked his left eye knowingly.

At this stage of Gideon's "offer," to Susan's unspeakable relief they had arrived at the 'Stacey loanin', and she lost no time in saying "good-night," adding: "I thank you again for your kind thought of me, an' I hope that what has passed between us will make no differ in our friendship."

Gideon turned angrily. "Friendship," he blustered, "who wants your friendship? Why, woman, you're not in your senses at all, an' don't know what you're sayin' or doin'. Mark my words, you'll rue it yet. Affrontin' me that offered you such a sittin'-down—the likes of which you could never have expected you that hasn't one penny piece to rub on another a slave in your brother's house ."

She interrupted him brusquely: "Don't, don't say nothin' more, Gideon; I'll bid you 'good-night.'"

She did not actually run down the loanin', but she could still hear him muttering to himself as he stamped on furiously without returning her "good-night."

Samuel Nethercote had likewise determined to attend the prayer meeting in Ezra McWha's, escort Miss Susan

Stacey home and make the proposal on the way. He had discussed the project of this marriage with his mother, and she had held the opinion that a Stacey was barely the social equal of the Nethercotes, and certainly not that of the McGillops, from whom she and her fortune were derived. Her son insisted that Susan's well-known virtues compensated for any lack of blue blood that might match the McGillops, and finally Mrs. Nethercote, forseeing an excellent daughter-in-law, one who would minister satisfactorily to her own comfort, had consented to receive her as such, seeing she was at least an "elder's daughter."

However, on that particular prayer meeting evening, a contrary cow calved, and when the fuss was over it proved too late for Samuel to dress in time to be present.

It had long been his mother's custom to retire early to keep up her strength, and after she had gone to bed he sat thoughtfully by the fire in the armchair she had vacated, and pondered over the means to discomfit his rival. Samuel held himself to be a crafty man, and in every way superior to that "gomeril of a widda-man, who thought any girl would take him."

To settle the question on a Sunday evening coming from Ednagarvil School-house was out of the question; either one or both of the little sisters accompanied her and were very much in the way. He thought of how Susan worked for them all without receiving any gratitude, and never was given a kind word from that "targe," as he called Mrs. Thomas. Susan's heart was set in her brother, he knew. Poor Thomas was the "henpeckednest" man in the County Tyrone, and daren't "cheep."

"She'll have the queer good time of it in this comfortable house," he ruminated. "That is, if she gives in to my mother," he qualified it. "An' I'm sure she will, she'll be so thankful to get me an' such a good home. Then I'll be even with that oul' hypocrite, not but what I know she wouldn't look at the side of the road he was on. I flatter myself I'm a dale better lookin' than he is, an' a brave bit younger, for all he lets on we're of an age, an' that when the one dies the other may quake for fear." He slapped his knee suddenly. "I have it now. I'll write to her."

Now Samuel was anything but a fluent scribe, and had not much practice of the art. Once a year he wrote to his brother in America—with little variety in his communications—He hoped his brother and family were well, as this left him at present; his mother had not been too well this past year, her roomatism hampered her; the harvest was poor; tom hegarty's old white horse, that he would mebbe mind, had died on him on the harvest-time he was 27—Such was a sample.

"My spellin's not too good," he confessed, "but shure if Shusan can make out the meanin', that's all that's wanted. I'll try an' make it as plain as I can."

Having collected with some difficulty a sheet of paper, a rusty pen and an ink bottle that required a coaxing of water to make it flow, he spread himself at one end of the kitchen table, put out his tongue, and scratched out the matter-of-fact proposal.

"Dear Shusan,

This is just a few lines to aquent you that I'm thinkin strong of gettin married for my mother keeps

doncy and not fit for much. I have a likin for you and I hope you have one for me. After harvest would be a good time to do it when the throng is past. hopin this will be agreeable to you.

Yours truly,

S. Nethercote.

X X X X X X X"

Next afternoon he waylaid the Stacey children on their way home from school, beckoned to Maggie to come to him, gave her a half-penny and told her to put this letter in her pocket, let nobody see it and tell nobody about it, and to slip it to her aunt as soon as she went home when nobody was looking.

This secret communication caused Maggie to feel intensely important. It was thrilling. She ran all the way home.

Susan was sitting on a sack on the potato-house floor picking potatoes and singing with fervour :—

"In the swe-e-t bye and bye
We shall meet on that beautiful shore."

She stopped suddenly and looked up as Maggie rushed in breathlessly. "You're surely home early the day," she greeted her.

Maggie, after first looking round the dark potato-house, furtively drew forth the missive from her pocket and whispered : "Mr. Nethercote told me to give you this, an' not to let on to anybody. "

"Dear Oh ! " said the surprised recipient, and then quickly added : "Run in, dear, an' get your dinner—that's a good girl."

When Maggie had vanished reluctantly and full of curiosity, she turned the letter over and over with suspicion. The potato-house possessed no window, and

the scrawl was hard to read. Then, grasping the import of its contents, she laughed, read it once more and laughed, thrust it into her pocket and went on with her work, but not with her singing.

It sobered her mirth to think what was required of her in this situation, and decided: "I'll answer it afore I go to bed, when I get the children asleep."

It was late before she found the time to do so. Johnnie's elbow required a patch, and the heel was out of Minnie's stocking. Tired, as usual, when it came to night, she sat down at the small, rickety table between the beds, Maggie and Minnie asleep in one and little Susie in her own, and wrote slowly and laboriously:

"Dear Samuel,

I am thankful to you for your kind offer, but I cannot accept it, for I am happy and content in the state I am in at present, and would not change it for anybody, but I hope you and me will always be friends.

Yours truly,

Susan Stacey."

Exhausted as she was with both the work and excitement of the day, she did not dream of omitting to read her chapter and say her prayers. She would not have done otherwise had she got six proposals, and as she laid her tired head on the pillow repeated, as always, the sweet petition of her childhood:

"Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BAPTISM

On that same early sweet Summer morning as the McBriars took their adventurous excursion, "Whitegates," the home of the Starritts, was also in a pleasurable state of bustling excitement. Seven weeks' old baby was being arrayed for her baptism in the same robe as her mother had worn on a similar occasion twenty-five years ago, and was to make her first appearance in Daffadilly Meeting-house, in which her father was an elder, and in which he himself had been dedicated in baptism at a similar age.

David Starritt had had an honourable record in that same congregation, first as Sabbath-school scholar, then teacher, superintendent of Sabbath school, and finally elder. These offices did not exhaust his efforts for its welfare. Every matter appertaining to the material and spiritual concerns of his church claimed his warm-hearted support and, indeed, inauguration. He and his wife, as it were, willingly bore the burden of the church on their shoulders, for owing to Mr. Lovekin's supposed delicacy, and his sister's absorption in his health, the onerous task of the successful upkeeping of the congregation was left to their leadership. To both it was a "labour of love." They loved above all things "the habitation of the house where His honour dwelleth."

Their home also was at all times placed at its service —a hospitable haven of rest and relaxation for all pilgrims on Presbyterial concerns bent.

To-day was "Fast Day" in Daffadilly. The Reverend Jeremy Sturrock was to preach and to receive little Margaret Mary Starritt into the visible Church on earth and to perform the ceremony of her dedication to the God of her fathers.

Although it was the busy season a fair congregation had gathered, for Mr. Sturrock was considered a fine, sound preacher, and certainly he was a vigorous and fearless one, never shirking to declare "the whole counsel of God." While Mr. Lovekin was the cooing dove of the Presbytery, the Reverend Jeremy was the eagle, whose piercing eye could detect any irregularity or doubtful procedure in connection with ecclesiastical orthodoxy. His admiring old elder used to say: "Every word from him is like a shot from a gun."

Mrs. Starritt had had a busy morning, but that was nothing unusual with her. To-day she would have guests to dinner in honour of baby—Mr. Sturrock and Fanny, Mr. and Miss Lovekin, Mr. Starritt's great-aunt, Mrs. Doule, and Dr. Dodd. She had also staying on a visit a cousin of David's from Belfast—a medical student. Everything that could have been prepared was done the day before, and as David's sister, Aunt Martha, the conscientious housewife, was going to the service and taking baby's small brother, Teddy, a sister of Mrs. Starritt's had come from Castleferran to take charge of necessary culinary arrangements while all were away.

Baby was getting the finishing touches now to her toilet. Her sleeves were being looped up by bows of pink ribbon, leaving the rounded dimpled arms bare, and wrapped in a new white shawl she was handed

over to Aunt Emily to hold while Mrs. Starritt completed her hurried dressing.

Mother, with babe in arms, set out by the path across the fields that led to the church—surely the loveliest way to go to God's House—mind and soul uplifted by Nature, and prepared by her peace and calm for worship. How human and near to us comes our Lord's custom of walking in the fields on the Sabbath.

The beauty of that radiant morning stirred the mother's heart with rapture and gratitude to her Creator. All around new life was springing. God was providing again for the wants of man in the corn that fringed the path. The fresh green of trees, the snowy flowers of the hawthorn hedges ministered to man's love of the spiritual. God had provided for all needs, and she felt confident that the Heavenly Father, Who even notes the sparrow's fall, would guard the young life that she was formally giving to-day into His safe-keeping.

Close behind—very close—and with important bearing walked "Grouse," the beautiful red setter, on his self-imposed task of escorting and protecting this new but already beloved member of his adored family. He had sensed with his doggy intuition that, from the fuss and excitement, something momentous was about to happen, and he would certainly do his part loyally.

The meeting-house door stood open. Mrs. Starritt entered softly and seated herself on the bench in the hall to await the sexton's call to her to come inside when the time would come for the ceremony, and Grouse crouched himself at her feet.

The Reverend Jeremy Sturrock's powerful voice reached her distinctly concluding his sermon; he had now reached the application.

His subject was the terrible plight of the guest who had not on a wedding garment. As was customary on "Fast Days," the sermon was intended to be a warning to those who were coming to the Lord's Table on the following Sabbath. Mrs. Starritt could hear him declaim the searching question: "How camest thou in hither not having on a wedding garment?" and the preacher's concluding words, uttered slowly and most impressively, were a sermon in themselves: "And—he —was—speechless." Then, after a solemn pause: "Let us pray."

"Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who redeemed our souls with His blood on Calvary, may none present here, we beseech Thee, present themselves at Thy table without the wedding garment of Thy forgiveness. Thou, to whom our secret sins are open, prevent us from still more soiling our souls by presuming to be acceptable to Thee without Thy forgiveness. Thou, Lord, wilt give the wedding garment for the asking in sincerity and humility. May all here be clothed with it when they go to meet Thee at Thy coming feast. Amen."

"Old John," the sexton, now came to usher in mother and child. Mrs. Starritt unwrapped baby's shawl and laid it on the bench, telling Grouse to "mind it." Grouse understood, stretched himself before it and assured her by his earnest gaze that he would die to guard it.

David Starritt came from his pew, taking up his

stand beside his wife, and the minister came down from the pulpit, while four-years'-old Teddy Starritt watched with bewildered attention what was going to happen to his new little sister.

The parents got a rather lengthy exhortation as to the manner of bringing up their child in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord."

"I am no priest," said the minister. "How could the sprinkling of a few drops of water on this unconscious infant make her 'a child of God and heir of the Kingdom of Heaven.' The greatest villains in the world have been baptized. No, the entrance to the Christian life is not by baptism, which is merely a symbol, nor by any other 'ism,' but by an experience of Jesus Christ as your Lord and Master. These parents bring their child into God's House to do their part in dedicating her to God's service, and bespeak the prayers and interest of their fellow-worshippers in her welfare in this world and the next."

Mrs Starritt placed her little daughter in her father's arms, and the minister sprinkled her with water from a glass bowl, saying: "Margaret Mary, I baptize thee in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost."

There followed an earnest prayer for "this dear young child just starting on life's perilous path with all its quicksands, that her feet may never stray from the King's highway, and that she might be consecrated to her Saviour, so that when the journey is over she may enter the Presence of the Judge of all the earth and hear Him pronounce: 'Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.'"

They sang without accompaniment of any kind :—

"I know that safe with Him remains,
Protected by His power,
What I've committed to His trust
Till the decisive hour."

The minister lifted up his hands, pronounced the Benediction, and the simple service ended.

The womenfolk came forward to shake hands with Mrs. Starritt, admire her baby and express their good wishes for her welfare. When mother and baby reached the hall Grouse had never stirred, but had faithfully kept his promise. As the congregation filed through he kept emitting low threatening growls intended to deter anyone who had any designs on his baby's property from interfering with it.

Coming back across the field Fanny Sturrock carried the precious little bundle closely overlooked by Grouse, who was not fully convinced that she was capable of such an enormous responsibility.

Now, had Mrs. Starritt maliciously planned to seat Miss Sturrock beside Alexander at dinner? Such were Miss Lovekin's disturbing suspicions as the Reverend Jeremy Sturrock "asked a blessing."

Conversation at the Whitegates board was always spontaneous and invigorating. David possessed a fund of lively humour emanating from a pure heart and clean lips. He had held mother, sister and wife in the highest reverence that he accorded all good womanhood. He had also a sagacious knowledge of public affairs, social and ecclesiastical; a man of high ideals and a true gentleman.

Teddy sat in his high chair by his mother's side, while Grouse lay stretched on the floor behind his master.

"Your poor old sexton looks nearly done," observed Mr. Sturrock. "He was actually here the first time I preached, and not a young man then."

Said Mr. Lovekin: "He was very ill not long ago and despaired of by four doctors. In spite of that he recovered and is fairly well now."

David laughed. "What I always say is that all the doctors in the world couldn't kill you till your time comes." All joined in the laugh at the doctor's expense.

"There's one Daffadilly man done for anyway, and that's old William MacTosh," said the doctor.

"Wasn't he an ardent Orangeman?" asked Mr. Sturrock.

"And still is," said David. "Why, only a fortnight ago his dog killed the priest's cat."

Said the doctor: "Yesterday he implored me—'Doctor, dear, could you not patch me up to do over the Twelfth.' He is eighty-seven, and last year walked with the drums to the 'field.'"

"Lamentable," pronounced Mr. Sturrock. "He should be preparing for his future state instead of dwelling on vainglorious celebrations. I, too, have a hearer hopelessly ill, and as far as I can discover his spiritual state is indeterminate."

The young Belfast gentleman now put forth his voice with the intention of showing off his superior mentality over these country folk, whose conversation was almost altogether about parsons and churches and "spiritual states." "When I arrive at my death-bed," he protested, "I want no priestcraft, either 'Papal' or

'Presbyterian,' or extreme unction either, with or without oil."

"Young man"—Mr. Sturrock had not caught his name, so addressed him by this appropriate title—"I have seen during my long ministry many young men like yourself rejoice in their strength, yet when faced by eternity were glad to avail themselves of the ministrations of the Gospel, and I sincerely hope that you will do likewise when your time comes."

Thereupon there followed a rather awkward silence, relieved by their host inviting his guests to have a second helping of roast chicken. Mr. Lovekin willingly responded, at the same time complimenting Mrs. Starritt on its "exquisite tenderness." His sister, seated at Mr. Starritt's right, laid a deterring hand on his arm to limit the extent of the portion, "And no seasoning, please, Alexander's stomach cannot digest it." Mr. Sturrock accepted a goodly portion willingly, remarking that it was the seasoning he liked best. "I believe his daughter would let him eat anything," thought Miss Lovekin. Aloud she said: "Is your father never bilious, Miss Sturrock?"

"Often," smiled Fanny.

The conversation then turned on travelling. Mr. Lovekin had had a letter that morning from a clerical friend who was travelling in Palestine, in which he said that when he asked permission of his Bishop to leave for a time to visit that country, the busy dignitary had just replied on a postcard: "Go to Jericho."

"I do envy those people," said Fanny, "who get such lovely trips, and say to myself when I hear of them, 'Oh! why was I not born rich instead of beautiful?' I have at least been in Paris, and I feel I shall be

happier in Heaven for having seen it." During dinner she had divided her attention between Mr. Lovekin and the Belfast visitor, Mr. Skelton, who sat opposite. They had already discovered a mutual acquaintance with whom Fanny had been at school.

Now I come to think of it," said he, "I believe we sleep in the same church."

"Who sleeps in church?" demanded Mr. Sturrock.

"I do," said the brazen Mr. Skelton.

"Young man." Mr. Sturrock was just forming the words when Dr. Dodd poured oil on the waters by saying: "I do it sometimes myself, I must confess, but I never could see why it was considered so disgraceful. On the contrary, I hold it shows implicit confidence in your minister."

Mr. Sturrock was mollified, and smiled at this mitigating aspect of the usually considered heinous offence.

Mr. Lovekin could see that his sister was shocked at the tone of Fanny's conversation with the complete stranger.

She was actually saying: "I intend going to Belfast soon, and may see you there."

"Yes, indeed, we must make arrangements to meet," he agreed heartily; "how long do you propose to stay?"

"That depends on how long I am welcome."

"You will never come back to us, I fear, in that case," said the gallant Mr. Lovekin.

"Mr. Lovekin," Fanny explained to the Belfast man, "is an adept at flattery."

"Well," protested the flatterer, "everything is the better of a little oil, from a lady to a wheelbarrow."

Said Mr. Starritt: "My plan, when I go on a visit, is just to stay till they change the food on me."

"Mrs. Starritt's visitors must stay an unwarrantable time on that principle," said her visitor. "I, at any rate, can't repay her kindness, but will just leave that duty to the Recording Angel."

"That will save you a lot of trouble," Fanny told him.

"I suppose you know, Miss Sturrock, that that friend of yours of whom you were speaking is now a widow?"

"I'm so glad. Edith was such a pretty girl. I could have cried when I heard she was going to marry that elderly, ugly specimen."

"He was a minister," reproved Miss Lovekin.

"And, of course," retorted Fanny, "any minister is better than no minister."

Meanwhile Mr. Starritt and the two ministers were discussing the Tough vacancy. "Any word of a settlement yet?" he enquired from Mr. Lovekin, who was convener of the commission in charge.

"There was one they might all possibly have agreed on, but he has got a call to First Bumford."

"I suppose that is a better place."

"Oh! much."

The clever young city man again butted in. "Isn't it strange," he remarked, "that the Lord never calls anyone to a lower stipend?"

The Reverend Jeremy regarded him with a steady eye. "No, not in the least strange, young man," he informed him, "because He doesn't approve of it."

Now that they were on Mrs. Doule's favourite subject she felt at liberty to air her grievances anent the present-day ministers.

"The men now-a-days don't stay long enough in one place. I remember the time when your minister was your minister for life."

"Some ministers," Mr. Lovekin assured her, "are like some plants, and require transplanting for their proper development."

"Yes," said their host slyly, "and some congregations benefit by a change, too. Aren't you going to celebrate your centenary in Daffadilly soon, Aunt Jane?"

"In two years' time, but I'll hardly live to see it."

"But you'll do your best," urged David.

It was almost with bated breath they at last spoke of what had created a sensation in every home far and near—the elopement that had shocked a congregation and countryside.

Said Miss Lovekin: "Miss Gordon was always, I thought, rather light and flippant, and seemed very fond of dress."

Fanny was up in arms immediately for her friend. "Not in the least, Miss Lovekin. She was beautiful, and everything looked well on her, and the woman who does not take pains to make herself look as nice as possible is an unsexed creature and not what her Creator intended her to be. I would like to look handsome in my coffin."

Mrs. Starritt sighed. "My only hope is that she may not regret her rash act. Poor Eunice! I loved her mother."

"My word, she will rue it," said her husband emphatically, and everyone seemed to agree with him.

Tears rose to Fanny's eyes. She could not endure to

hear Eunice spoken of harshly. Under her apparent gaiety was a heavy heart.

They sat long over the tea and "christening cake" that followed dinner. The unconscious heroine of the day joined the company lying in her mother's arms in all her bravery. Rosy and lovely from her sleep she stared with wide open eyes at the strange faces around with that wistful, questioning look of the newly-come to this earth, as though seeking the explanation of the mystery.

Aunt Martha, always serene and quiet, had not taken much part in the conversation. She sat beside Teddy and watched that he did not upset his plate or spill his mug of tea over his cake. Her calm Madonna-like face glowed with happiness on this great occasion in the family life. She was much older than Mr. Starritt, and owing to their mother's delicacy had been a second mother to him, as she was to be now to another generation of Starritts. Her brother had been and was to this day the first object of her life, his comfort and well-being watched over unselfishly and lovingly, she was interested in all his concerns. She would be faithful to him till death, would, indeed, have died for him, and was loyal to his wife.

Said Mrs. Doule: "I see you are very fond of Teddy, Miss Starritt."

"Not more than I was of his father," she replied.

Mr. Sturrock got to his feet, saying: "We must be taking the road, Fanny, dear, for I have to speak this evening at a farmers' meeting in Castleferran."

"Oh! you're always speaking at something; I do wish you'd give your throat a rest some times."

"Yes, indeed," echoed Miss Lovekin, for once in agreement with Fanny, "these heated meetings are dangerous, you should not allow him to attend them."

"I might as well try to stop the wind from blowing. Alick, the servant man, often says, 'the master will die on the road yet.'"

"And I could not wish a better departure," said her father.

"I am so sorry we have to go, Mrs. Starritt," apologized Fanny, "I hope you will bring Mr. Skelton over to tea with us before he leaves."

"Unfortunately I must go to-morrow," interposed Mr. Skelton, "but next time ."

There were cordial good-byes, Mr. Lovekin exceeding everyone else in a demonstration of goodwill, and giving Fanny a caress on the shoulder with which he always accompanied a farewell to his lady friends. Fanny called it "the pastoral pat."

On the way home Miss Lovekin said to her brother: "I'm downright glad she didn't manage to get that fool of a Belfast fellow over to Ballydeuteronomy Manse to tea. Don't you see now for yourself, Alexander, what a perfect minx she is?"

CHAPTER XV.

HALLOWE'EN.

Ann Twigg had kept faithful to her promise that she would stay at night with Martha Harbison, and Martha was duly grateful. She, however, proved a questionable companion for the nervous young mistress of "Goatee" Harbison's snug little farm.

For Ann was undoubtedly "psychic" (although she had never heard the word in her life) and had decided leanings to the occult and, according to herself, much experience of the supernatural.

What to others seemed an apparently trivial happening appeared to her superior knowledge fraught with stupendous issues of the utmost importance.

For instance, a glance at the candle revealed to her the precise moment you might expect to receive a letter, while from the dregs of your tea-cup (if turned upside down and round three times) she could read impending events in your life as from a printed book; while in interpreting obscure dreams she was a veritable Joseph. With prognostications of approaching death she was particularly familiar, such as corpse-candles, the howling of dogs, or the seeing of wraiths.

From "day-li-gone" Martha and Ann would sit in the firelight, Ann narrating and Martha listening avidly to stories of hair-raising phenomena, so that, although fascinated by their eeriness, it was just then Martha would welcome the well-known heavy tread of William James on the door-step, his bold lifting of the latch, and

his hearty "Good evening, girls, it's a brave night," or "it's just teemin'," as the case might be. Whereas before his entrance they spoke almost in whispers, as though invisible listeners were around them, their voices regained their ordinary confident tones when William James had seated himself on the "settle." His big, wholesome presence seemed to fill the kitchen to the exclusion of ghost or goblin, and they even ventured to laugh.

On this particular evening before the arrival of William James they had been discussing their favourite subject of marriage.

"How was it, Ann, you never come to marry?" enquired Martha.

"Just because it never come in coorse."

"I wouldn't wonder but you might get a man yet."

"Dear sen I may—that's if he's a brave dacent one. Only last night I was dreamin' of a funeral, an' that means a weddin' sure, for dreams go by contraries."

"I dream at times about funerals, too, Ann, an' I keep on dreamin' constant about uncle. He seems to ha'nt me, as he said he would, about William James, for he was dead set on me marryin' him."

"I don't know why you don't do it, I'm sure, for he's a dacent sort of man as men go, an' he works in your interest early an' late, an' what you would do wantin' him I can't think."

"Do you think, Ann, that if I don't do what uncle wanted, anything uncanny might happen me?"

Ann reflected a moment or two and then launched out into a parable.

"I knowed a head-strong girl once an' she was for marryin' a sartin man, an' her father warned her on his

death-bed not to do it. But after he was undergroun' didn't she act defiant and detarmined she would marry him. The very evenin' afore her weddin' day she was comin' up her own loanen, an' what does she see?"

"Her father," speculated Martha.

"No, but a big magpie hopped fernenst her an' looked her full in the face. I'm not sayin' it mightn't have been her father, for birds above all other beasts is well known to be specially knowledgeable about people's concerns. Never yet was there a death of one of our-ones but a robin redbreast come into the house by the door or by the windy afore it happened.

"But as I was tellin' you about this comrade girl of mine, the very minit she caught that magpie's knowin' wee black eye she give a shiver an' she looked all roun' her for another, for two's joy, but nary a one was there but its lone self. So like a sensible girl she took it for a warnin', an' not one toe would she go to the meetin'-house next day—an' the beef bought for the weddin'!"

"I suppose she never married, then, at all," surmised Martha.

"Did she not, indeed? Didn't the rascal get round her again—for that same playboy could wile the birds off the bushes—an' the weddin' day was fixed once more, an' the beef bought for the weddin'. Well, the very evenin' afore, comin' home up her loanen didn't she meet the same identical blackbird in the same place—she knowed him by the tail—an' he cocked his wee head to one side an' looked her full in the face again. She was heart-scarred, but sez she to herself: 'I be to go on with it now, no matter what happens, or I'll be the laughin'-stock of two townlan's,' an' she did, an' afore a twelvemonth he cut his throat."

"An' she was left a young widda-woman?" said the sympathetic Martha.

"Not her, indeed, that would have been too good luck for her (the devil hadn't room for him just then). He got better in no time an' started to persecute her, lettin' on that he was goin' to do it again, an' goin' roun' lookin' for the razor that she had hid, an' aye rediculin' her fór hidin' it."

"Mebbe he took a drop," suggested Martha.

"More nor a drop. You might as well try to fill a rat-hole with whiskey as him. He would stagger in at nights from market shoutin' an' belawrin', an' set himself fernenst the fire to take off his brogues, and when he got one off he would fling it back'ards over one shoulder an' brek half the bowls on the dresser to smithereens. Then after he got the tother one off he would fling it over the tother shoulder, an' what the one missed the other hit, an' the rattle of the delph put him in the best of humour, an' he would stagger to his bed shoutin' that he was the best man in Ballybackwards."

"An' was he not ashamed of hisself the morra mornin'?" pursued Martha.

"Him! You couldn't make thon blagyard blush barrin' you were to stick a knife in his cheek."

"Poor woman," sighed Martha.

"Well, she brought it on herself by neglectin' the magpie's second warnin'."

To-night Ann was surpassing herself at uncanny narrations, and realizing the effectiveness of her dramatic gift, she passed to a blood-curdling experience that had befallen a second cousin of her grandmother—this victim had seen a ghost!

It appeared, according to Ann's account, that this

far-out cousin was staying on a visit with an aunt and was sleeping in a room by herself, and on chancing to open her eyes she beheld "something" coming into the room, although the door never opened.

At this gruesome stage of Ann's narrative the door behind them did open with a bold lifting of the latch that caused them to jump. Then in a moment, to their relief, they realized this was no ethereal visitant, but one of flesh and blood in the person of the robust, six-footed William James with his hearty "Good-evenin', girls, what are yez confabbin' about the night?"

Said Martha excitedly: "Ann's just after tellin' about her grandmother's second cousin what seen a ghost."

"Boys-a-boys!" he ejaculated, "I wouldn't like that to happen to me. But go on with your story till I hear the whole piece."

Ann commenced afresh: "It come right through the door like a grey shadow an' glided through the room, for it never touched the groun' with its feet—if it had any."

"I thought ghosts were always white," interrupted Martha.

Ann explained that though white was really the normal colouring, yet varieties from type had been occasionally noted, and continued her saga.

"The spirit in its wanderin's stopped dead when it come to Peggy Liza's (that was her name) skirt that was hangin' on the wall fernenst the bed, an' after that Peggy-Liza fainted an' could tell no more of its proceedings. When she come to she tried to shout, but

no sound would come out of her throat, an' she just lay with her head under the clothes trim'lin till mornin'.

"But listen to this, for this is the curioustest part. Her handkerchief—a red one spotted with white—was in her pocket (Peggy-Liza said she could take her oath on that), well, nobody in this world ever seen it again!"

There was a solemn pause, and William James, who looked terribly impressed, shook his head gravely to denote the seriousness of the event.

"She never slep' her lone again, I'll be boun'," came from Martha in faint tones.

"Never," affirmed Ann, "for from that very night she shrank, an' shrank, an' afore a twelvemonth the grass was green on her grave."

Martha seemed deprived of speech, and William James still kept jerking his head sideways in consternation. Then, rising, he knocked the ashes out of his pipe preparatory to putting it in his pocket, and said he must be "pushin' on," for he had another "arrand" to do.

To his delighted surprise Martha pleaded: "Don't go yet a wee while, William James," which caused him to sit down again immediately. At long last Martha had expressed a desire for his company.

As William James turned out of Martha's loanin' a full hour later he met the old friend of his boyhood, Ned Shanks.

"Well," observed Ned, "you're late the night; you must be comin' good speed up there."

"Not a dale," confessed Martha's lover, "but my mind

has hit on a plan that might speed it up, an' I would need your help in the carryin' out of it."

"Sartinly, to be sure. I'll do all in my power if I only know how to set about it."

"You mind, Ned, that the oul' man afore he died warned her that if she didn't take me he would ha'nt her?"

"Oh! aye, the whole countryside heerd that. Was he in the deliriums?"

"Not him! He was as sensible as you an' me now. What I want you to do is to lend me the loan of thon oul' goat of yours—the one the people says that the Orangemen have to ride the night they're made in the Orange Hall, where you're the Master. With thon long, white baird under his chin wouldn't he nearly pass for Goatee' Harbison of a dark night?"

'Aye, now that you remark it, he would put you in mind of him, but he has four legs an' 'Goatee' had only two."

"No matter, it's only the face of him that I want. Don't you know the high-up windy at the back of Martha's kitchen, where the groun' rises so high behind? I want you to go up there an' houl' his face agin the glass some night. He mightn't stan' for me, an' that might help to do the business."

Ned entered wholeheartedly into this scheme. It brought back to him his youthful days when he and William James played many a practical joke on the neighbours. He stopped and slapped his knee. "That's the very indentical thing," he said; "I never heerd tell of a better 'set.' She'll think it's the uncle come back to ha'nt her."

They next decided on the night. Hallowe'en, a week

distant, would be altogether suitable, for as Ned said: "That is the night for freits an' wonderments as never was, the oul' boy himself walkin' the roads an' frightenin' the wits out of anybody that is foolish enough to be out with the rattle of his chains."

It would be the night for this manoeuvre both he and William James agreed—the very night.

Hallowe'en turned out to be a desperately wild night. The wind moaned and groaned in Martha's wide chimney, and whistled and sighed through the house like the lament of lost spirits.

Martha and Ann sat by the fire almost silent, listening to these sounds and to the tumult of the elements outside. Both felt the need of something sustaining, and when Martha proposed to wet a good strong cup of tea, Ann heartily responded to the offer.

After drinking to the dregs the alluring contents of their bowls, both turned them upside down and round three times—a necessary formula towards "reading" what was therein revealed.

Seizing Martha's, Ann peered earnestly into it, wrinkling her brows in deep thought, then delivered herself thus:

"I can see a dale of people all gathered in one place, with a tall man standin' fernenst them. He has a castor hat an' tails to his coat, so he must be a clargyman. It's a weddin', as sure as you're sittin' there."

"Whose, Ann?"

"Your own, to be sure, when it's in your own boul."

"Now I wonder who it would be to?" mused Martha.

"Tell me what the groom's like?"

"A well-set-up blackavised big man." But Martha pretended ignorance of anyone answering that description.

Ann then took up her own bowl to "read" its revelations, but Martha evidently was not listening to the mysteries it unfolded, and appeared quite lost in thought.

Ann, having satisfied her curiosity, rose to put the bowls away, and in doing so knocked down a knife off the kitchen table.

"That's a sure sign of a stranger coming in," she commented, picking it up.

"Who on earth would come out a night like this?" said Martha.

But Ann proved a first rate prophet. Scarcely were the words out of her mouth when a knock came. "Go you, Ann," whispered Martha, "I'm afeard," and Ann courageously opened the door an inch.

The visitor proved to be Ned Shanks.

"Good-evenin' to you, ladies," he said, politely removing his cap. William James never thought of this piece of etiquette, and sat comfortably all the time of his visit with his head covered. "It's a tarrible night, blowin' an' stormin' an' teemin' rain, an' dark as pitch; you couldn't see a stime," he said.

"Take a seat," urged Martha, setting forward a chair, "an' give yourself a heat, for you must be starved."

"No, thank ye, Miss Harbison, I haven't the time to be sittin' at the present. I was just passin' the fut of your loanen on my way home an' thought, as a friend, I'd acquaint you that there's rumours of strange appearances roun' here at night."

Martha, with Dutch courage, put up a brave front. "Likely it'll be some of them gipsies from over beyant at Clabber."

"It's no gipsies accordin' to them that has seen it an' got the fright of their lives. Martha, take my advice an' get a man of your own. It's not safe for you two weemen to be your lone at nights. I'm a bit afeard myself to be trudgin' these roads on Holleve night, an' I only wish I was safe home without seein' any apparition. But I must be pushin' on. Good-night to yez, an' may ye be kept from harm."

Immediately the door latch clicked behind him Martha burst out: "What business is it of his interferin' in what doesn't concarn him?"

"He's a brave dacent man," soothed Ann, "an' only done it out of kindness, I'll be boun'. There's no sayin' what's wanderin' about on this night of all nights. All my days I was afeard of Holleve night."

They drew their stools closer to the fire. Martha proposed to light the lamp, but Ann said it was nicer to "crack" in the firelight. "We'll light it as soon as the dumplin's done. Did you put a ring in it, Martha?"

"I did, of coorse, but sure there's only the two of us for it, barrin' William James drops in."

They sat for a time silent, watching the heartsome three-legged pot hanging from the crane puffing and spitting with the fury of its boiling. It was, indeed, a re-assuring sight on this weird night.

Feeling secure from the wild spirits that seemed gambolling outside, and feeling fortified by the strong

tea, Martha begged her companion to tell a story to pass the time till the dumpling would be ready, and Ann, of course, willingly complied.

"Did I ever tell you the piece about Sally Grimes's husband, that the people said she poisoned, comin' back after he had been dead an' buried a full week?"

Martha began to feel less at ease. "Dear, oh! How could anybody have the heart to poison their own husband?"

"Oh! many's-a-one does that," Ann said lightly. "You have only to put a spoonful of rat poison in his tea some mornin'. Well, anyway one mornin' Sally's man took sudden bad after eatin' a hearty breakfast, an' was a corp before two hours. The doctor come an' said it was his heart, but on Holleve night, a week after, didn't he appear at her bedside carryin' in his han' the very cup she give him his breakfast in. The wee niece that slept with her for company, for she was narvous and kept the light burnin' all night, let out the whole proceedin'. That looked suspicious, didn't it?"

"Did she faint, Ann?"

"She went wrong in the head! ." All of a sudden Ann stopped. "There's somethin' lookin' in at the back windy, Martha! Don't look up! Don't look up!"

Martha did look up, and gave a shriek. "It's him! It's him! Ketch me, Ann, ketch me, I'm goin' to faint."

But Ann was incapable of rendering any assistance. Having looked up again, she promptly rolled off her chair and lay on the floor.

Five awful minutes passed—an eternity! Then

William James happened to come in and nearly stumbled over the incapable bodies.

"Are yez murdered, or what has happened?"

"We seen him!" gasped Ann.

"Seen who?"

"The uncle himself. He come to the back windy an' he looked in!"

William James looked thunderstruck. "That was semendable. I never knowed the like of that in my whole life."

By this time Martha was showing signs of recovery and was struggling to a sitting posture on the floor, assisted by William James's strong arms.

"What windy did he look in at?" he asked.

"The high-up one heavens! there he is again. Don't look up don't look up."

William James glanced up, but looked down again quickly and covered his face with one hand while he supported the limp Martha with the other.

"That's him for sartin," he exclaimed. "May I never see the like of that in my life again. I've a good mind to go home by Ballybilly, although it's a bit of a round, for he never was used walkin' on them roads. I'll not go for a while anyway."

"I'd advise you to wait till after twelve o'clock, for they all be to be back in their graves at midnight," and William James said he would follow Ann's wise counsel.

Martha had at last regained her voice, although it sounded faint. "William James, dear, don't leave us the night, don't leave us our lone for I'm all of a trimmle. . . What if he come into the house? I would die 'dead."

"I'd advise yez to put a curtain over that windy, an' keep it over it," counselled William James.

"It's not me that would go next or nigh that windy," declared Ann.

"Gimme a hammer an' a couple of nails an' I'll negotiate the matter."

"Ann, get him the blue checked apron in the drawer; that would do."

William James mounted the table and skilfully shut out any further apparitions, and after doing so seated himself on the "settle" and took out his pipe. He, at least, seemed to have recovered his nerve.

Said Martha: "They say that them that see spirits isn't long for this world that it's a warnin', like."

"I'm goin' to live on a while anyway," affirmed William James, "but only on one condition, that Martha will fulfil the wishes of the departed an' marry me. I never wanted anybody else, an' I'm more nor willin'. What about you, Martha?"

Martha was silent, her head drooping, but at last was understood to say she didn't know what to do.

Ann intervened and gave her decided judgment. "There's just the one thing for you to do, an' that is, marry William James. You couldn't live your lone, an' after this night I couldn't stay in a ha'nted house, nor nobody would marry you now to be ha'nted all their days."

"That's the right way of it," concurred William James, "for I couldn't come up of dark evenin's either, barrin' Martha was promised me. I'm a big strong man an' it has affected me quarely."

"Martha," commanded Ann, "will you spake up now an' say what you're goin' to do."

Martha's reply was almost inaudible. "I suppose I be to do it now."

"An' you'll never rue it," promised the gallant William James. "I always loved you, an' would want you for yourself if you never had one parch of lan' or one cow."

"Now," instructed Ann, "put your han' in his an' say you'll take him for better or worse."

William James extended a large hand. "Lay it there," he urged, and Martha shyly confided her small one to it for safe keeping.

Said Ann as a conclusion to the whole matter: "All's well that ends well," as the Scriptures say, "an' we've done a good night's work, layin' a ghost without bell, book, or candle. Now we'll see who'll get the ring in the dumplin'."

CHAPTER XVI.

JOB JEFFERSON'S COURTING

Gone were the days when the sun shone in all its glory and the butterflies held revels in the garden of The Hollow. Even the red-bronze tints of Autumn's exquisite painting had given place to stark, ghastly bare branches, swayed hither and thither by November's blustering breath.

And with these changes of nature, life at The Hollow had altered its course and had moved from the outside world to the ingle nook, where, as always, a royal "turf" fire crowned the hearth, dispensing a delightful glow into every corner of that cosy living-room. Summer or Winter the "master" demanded a good fire on coming in from field or market, and said it was a "welcome."

To-night the family were, as usual, gathered round the cheerful hearthstone. The elder permitted none of his household to be absent after dark, save they were attending a lecture or other function connected with any of the neighbouring Presbyterian churches. He would have no "runnin'," as he called it. For all his genial conversation and ever ready joke he possessed one Biblical qualification for his sacred office, that of his ability to "rule his own house."

He was now lying back in his chair, stockinged feet stretched out to the blaze, and dozing luxuriously. He had spent most of the day at Castleferran Fair, and had been therefore up early. All the others were busily occupied. Bob perused the *Castleferran News*, which

his father had brought home; Nellie and Agnes were seated at the table learning their lessons; Mrs. McBriar was engaged on her perennial knitting, and Christina sewed on a small warm garment for Agnes against the coming winter. Christina longed to read on these long indoor evenings—love stories—but both parents considered novels sinful; indeed, Mrs. McBriar held reading of any kind a waste of time—that most precious commodity. An hour on Sabbath afternoons spent on the religious papers issued in connection with her own church offered her enough mental stimulus to last her the week through. A lamp, with a tin reflector behind a well polished globe, hung on the wall and shed a bright light on the industrious workers below.

Such was the happy peaceful interior at The Hollow, when suddenly the sound of wheels fell on their ears, and to one that sound was like the rumble of the wheels of Juggernaut rolling over her body and soul.

"Thon'll be Mr. Jefferson," exclaimed Mrs. McBriar, starting up and giving her husband a "dunch" that caused him to open his eyes, reach for his discarded boots and make for the door. Meanwhile she bustled hospitably, swept up the hearth with the hearth besom, and signed to Christina, who was sitting nearest the bellows, to blow up the fire, which she did as directed, making the turf glow red as a furnace and sending showers of brilliant fireworks up the wide chimney; then she sat as one paralyzed listening to the effusive greetings to the visitor.

"Well, Mr. Jefferson, you're welcome," her father's hearty tones reached her from outside, "go on straight in to the fire and I'll take the pony out," while her mother at the door seconded the invitation "Come on

in, Mr. Jefferson, an' get a shin heat of the fire, for the evenings are frosty now, and you must be starved after your long drive. Let me help you off with your Ulster." Before unwinding the muffler from around his thick neck he shook hands with Christina, and she in duty bound arose and let him take her small lifeless hand in his large fat one, after which she resumed her seat and bent her head over her sewing.

Her elderly lover seated himself, as he was intended to do, in the master's armchair, filling it fully, pulled up his trousers more comfortably and placed a hand on each knee, smiling all the time ingratiatingly across at Christina, and said: "How's the world usin' you, Miss Christina?" She might have replied, truthfully, "not happily"; she merely said she was "quite well."

Presently the elder entered boisterously, as was his wont, and absorbed his guest to her relief. After their "shanagh" on the ups and downs of the market and unsatisfactory prices, the dialogue reverted to the affairs of Tough congregation, where Mr. Jefferson was senior elder, and which was at present vacant and had been so for six months. It was now in the fascinating throes of choosing a minister.

"You have a brave number on your list, I hear tell," she heard her father say.

"Only six, and we were at the fifth last Sabbath, an' in my opinion he was the only one yet that shaped at the preachin', barrin' one."

"Then it's more nor likely you'll be givin' him the call?"

The Tough elder shook his head determinedly. "We will not."

"Why? Did you hear anything to his discredit?"

"We did, surely. They say his wife isn't a great type of woman, that she goes to the theatre!"

"It might only be a rumour," interposed Mrs. McBriar, ready to defend her sex; "you can't believe the half of what you hear."

"It's as true as you're sittin' there," affirmed Mr. Jefferson. "I know the party, namin' no names, that seen her on the very steps of a Belfast theatre. So what do you think of that for a minister's wife?"

"It just shows," commented Mrs. McBriar, "how careful a minister should be in choosin' his wife—a minister's daughter, now, or an elder's . ."

"Her father is an elder in some Belfast meetin'. So what do you think of that for an elder's daughter?"

Both Mr. McBriar and his wife thought it very bad indeed, but Christina smiled indulgently.

"Of course that would finish him with the Tough people," surmised Mr. McBriar.

"Aye, you may say so," responded the staunch Tough adherent. "We're a bi-ordinary upright people. I wish I could say the same for other congregations round "

Mr. McBriar held his peace at this provocation. His private opinion, and that of the "other congregations," was that the Tough people were "a fightin' lot." But he simply enquired "How did the ones before him shape?"

"Well, one had one fault and one another. The first one of all had a good delivery, but his matter was weak, to my mind."

"An' the next?" enquired Mr. McBriar. "Would he not do?"

"Just wait till you hear about him! He was quare

an' modest-lookin', you would think 'butter wouldn't melt in his mouth.' Walkin' up the aisle to the pulpit, he kept his head down sideways an' his eyes on the floor, like a saint in a Catholic picture, an' that made all the weemen on his side. He stayed with the Mehargs, an' was just as modest-lookin' an' quiet till he went to bed. As usual, Mr. Meharg went out the last thing to have a look round an' see that all was right about the place, an' he happened to look up at his window, an' wondered it was open, for it was a brave frosty night. Then he minded it was gettin' the fashion now to sleep with your window open—a coul' fashion, I call it, an' no sense in it at all. Then lookin' up again didn't he see smoke comin' from it, an' he was on the point of shoutin' up to him to save his life, when there was a gust of wind an' on it the powerful smell of tobacco! You might say Mr. Meharg was flabbergasted, but he's a man of gumption. 'I'll not let on about it till I get him clear away,' he says to himself, an' next mornin' he drove him to Hightown an' acted quite agreeable, an' at partin' he says, 'Good-bye, Mr. Harker, for I'll hardly ever see you in this world again!'"

"I did hear that they were beginning to take a draw at the pipe," said Mrs. McBriar, "an' the dear knows what they'll be at next, mebbe playin' cards. Oh! now it's not easy comin' on the right one now-a-days. May the Lord send an improvement in them! Well, tell us about the third one."

"He was middlin' good in the pulpit, but terrible delicate-lookin', an' had a neck like a gander. We don't want a man we'd be buryin'. We want a man sound in both body an' doctrine."

"Aye, you need a strong man in Tough," said Mr. McBriar, ironically. "Well, would the fourth not have filled?"

"He had no voice to speak of, an' you know Tough is a big buildin'; the people at the back of the gallery couldn't lift half of his discourse."

"An' last Sabbath's man? What was wrong with him?"

"Dear! hadn't he false teeth!"

"How did you find it out? Did they interfer' with his speakin'?"

"Not one iota. He stayed with the McWhirters, an' in his hurry down to breakfast didn't he forget to put his teeth in. He had hardly sat down when he got up of a sudden, mumblin' something about his handkerchief, an' away he goes upstairs again. But Miss McWhirter had ketched sight of his mouth, for she's purty smart, an' she says he was no beauty wantin' them. James McWhirter told the whole piece in the Green afore meetin'."

Said Mrs. McBriar: "Choosin' a minister is like marryin', you don't know how they'll turn out till you have them a while, an' then you just be to thole them, only there's a chance your minister may get a call somewhere else, but you're saddled with your man till you get to Heaven."

"There'll be no marryin' or giving in marriage there," quoted the visitor.

"Isn't that text the great comfort, now?" exclaimed Mr. McBriar, nodding his head towards his wife, "for then I'll get red of her in the end."

Mrs. McBriar smiled serenely. She was accustomed to her husband's witticisms.

"An' so now you have only one man to come an' go on. What will you do if he doesn't show up well an' please all the Tough people?" enquired Mr. McBriar; "will you have another list?"

"We will, surely; there's no use in bein' too easily pleased."

Said Mr. McBriar: "When Mr. Adair come to us we had only a list of three. He was the first, an' we just saw he was cut out for us, an' we never rued our choice. The second one had too much assurance an' showed off too much. We saw he thought a dale of himself, an' it just scunnered us. The third was a bit of an evangelist—no depth in his preachin', an' it was rumoured that he had said to someone openly that he would have no objection to the singin' of hymns in public worship, that he would welcome them. Them were his very words—an' would you believe it, there was one or two for him?

"You know George Given? He's a good man, I'll allow, but he's not an out-an'-out Presbyterian, goes to tent meetin's, an' even prays at them. Well, the very next day after this evangelist fellow preached I was goin' to Castleferran in the horse an' cart when I meets him, an' was just passin' him as usual with the time o' day, when he stops an' asks me how I liked the preacher yesterday. An, sez he, 'In my opinion, you'll get nobody to beat him at both preachin' an' prayin.' Sez I: 'An' at singin' too; it mightn't be long till you'd hear a hymn given out from Kildarragh pulpit.' Sez he: 'An it might do us good. A good Gospel hymn, now, to a fine rousin' tune, stirs the heart quarely, an' the day's comin' when we'll hear them in Kildarragh Meetin' afore we join in them above.'

"I declare to you, Mr. Jefferson, sir, only for the grace of God in my heart an' me sittin' in the cart, I would have scattered him. But I just clicked my tongue to the horse an' left him stannin' there on the road."

"That was just the right way to answer a fool, according to his folly," approved the Tough elder.

"I hear tell," remarked Mrs. McBriar, "that the new man in 1st Castleferran is for all these new-fangled ways."

"He is, to be sure," confirmed Mr. Jefferson. "I suppose you heard tell of his last antic? What! You didn't? He has put up a board fernenst the meetin-house an' facin the street, an' on it is '1st Presbyterian Church.'"

Mr. McBriar shook his head in amused derision. "Sure the very dogs on the street," he said, "know it's 1st Castleferran."

"Sartainly, to be sure," went on Mr. Jefferson, "an' then he has his name an' letters after it. I never knew letters after a man's name made him a better preacher. You mind oul' Dr. Stuffy, of Killyclabber? He had most of the alphabet after him, an' anybody that could keep from dozin' under his preachin' deserved a medal."

"Aye, that's the truth," agreed Mr. McBriar. "Give me the man that can thump the pulpit an' look the congregation in the face, as much as to say: 'That's my way of it, an' you can take it or leave it.' But them men are goin' fast."

"But wait till you hear the rest," interrupted Mr. Jefferson. You know oul' Tommy Grimes, the sexton?

Well, hasn't he him on it too—'Mr. Thomas Graham, Sexton, Back Row, Castleferran.' Oul' Tommy never was 'mistered' before."

"He must be a carried-away craythe r," commented Mrs. McBriar; "but they say he is all for grandeur."

"Aye," supplemented her husband, "I would say that man has more sail nor ballast."

Mr. Jefferson rose stiffly. "Could I have a word with you in private?" he enquired of "the master."

"To be sure. Come up to the room."

Mrs. McBriar lifted a high brass candlestick from the mantel-piece, fixed a candle in it, led the way, and closed the door on the conspirators.

This apparently innocent proceeding was to poor Christina as a forewarning of doom. Even the youngsters, Agnes and Nellie, sensed something ominous. Bob winked at his mother, who had begun bustling, "on hospitable thoughts intent," telling Christina to get out the cups and saucers, and herself proceeding to cut generous slices of currant cake. So that when the mysterious interview ended and the door opened, revealing two well-pleased countenances, the tea was "wet" and all ready.

Mr. Jefferson resumed his comfortable chair and accepted smilingly a large cup of strong tea and a slice of bread and butter, which he balanced on his knee. How he succeeded in masticating it was a matter for speculation, for to the world he only had two teeth in front, one above and one below, and even they did not meet. His jaws, however, worked vigorously and despatched it, followed by two slices of currant cake, on the excellence

of which he complimented his hostess, and he was easily induced to have a second and stronger cup of tea.

After finishing these delicacies, he remarked jovially: "Now, like the beggars, I'll be going," and, brushing the crumbs from his knee with his red spotted handkerchief, he rose to his feet.

Mrs. McBriar urged politely that "it is early yet." She would have said this had it been eleven o'clock and her eyes closing with sleep. It was the correct formula.

She helped him into his "Ulster," and he himself wound the knitted muffler round his short thick neck. "Are you sure you'll be warm enough?" she enquired, as she handed him his hat, which he pulled well down over his ears to protect his bald head. He shook hands all round, giving Christina's an extra pressure that she could not misinterpret and which made her feel mortally sick.

Her father came in, having given the esteemed visitor a hearty send-off, and began to divest himself of his boots. Christina, having washed-up and put the cups and saucers past, was leaving the kitchen.

"Christina."

Her heart stopped beating. She felt suffocated.

The elder did not beat about the bush: "Mr. Jefferson has bespoke you."

"Oh, no, no, father."

"But I say yes."

She burst into tears.

"It's the grand match for you, my girl; better nor Gideon Blair. He had a notion of you, too."

"I don't want any of them," sobbed Christina.

"No, you want somebody that hasn't the brenth of his foot of lan', nor one penny to rub on another. But the time will come when you'll be thankful that, if you

hadn't sense for yourself, your father had it for you—a sittin'-down past the common, an' an elder."

"I don't want an elder."

"Shame on you, an' you an elder's daughter. Away to your bed, now, an' consider what's for your good."

For the first time in her life Christina dared her father. "I'll never do it. I'll die first."

She fled to her room, glad to get some place where she could cry her heart out.

Sleep did come—after a time, for she was young—and transported her into happy oblivion. But the waking! Like an avalanche it swept over her, her awful plight, so that she was glad to jump up and plunge into her God-sent daily duties. All useless! Nothing could for one moment deflect her agitated mind from her threatened fate. "What will I do?" she kept repeating, "what will I do? and Archie so far away!"

For her lover had gone to Belfast to seek his fortune there, and was staying with a cousin, whose husband worked on "the Island." Alas! times were bad, and this man himself did not know the day he might be paid off.

She would write to Archie and tell him that the worst had happened, that the sword overhead had fallen and well-nigh killed her. Tears fell on the paper and blurred the writing, so that Archie guessed the cause.

But what could he do either? He wrote back encouraging her to "keep up your heart, dear love, and when I get back you can come to me"—forgetting that Christina was not yet of full age, and could not obey her own inclinations.

Her elderly suitor now regarded Christina in the light of his affianced bride, and drove over to The Hollow on Sabbath evenings to court her by taking a solid tea with her family, and afterwards conversing with his future father-in-law on matters that became that sacred evening, while Christina must perforce sit with folded hands, and heart weighed down with despair.

A terrible ordeal was hers the first evening she was purposely left alone with her prospective husband. On his drawing his chair close to hers, she sprang up in a panic and widened the distance.

"You're bashful, I see, Christina," he said, "but I like you all the better for it," and proceeded to inform her of the improvements he was contemplating about the place in her honour. "I'll come for you some day with the croydon till you see them. An' anything else you want done, you have only to say the word. Mebbe you'd fancy new curtains for the windows. Mary Jane kept the house very tasty, but since she went it has gone back a bit, for every house, big or small, needs a woman of its own.

"You'll have all Mary Jane's good clothes, too—a black silk dress—for she liked to go grand to meetin', an' a dolman just glitterin' with beads, an' there's more than one pair of good 'lastic-sided boots—they might be on the big side for you, for she had a brave foot, an' took sevens, but they'll be all the easier for your corns."

Would he never cease, she thought in despair, enumerating all the advantages of being Mary Jane's successor? But on he droned "An' you'll be ridin' to meetin' in your own conveyance, an' you'll find yourself well respected there, bein' the wife of the senior elder. Then you'll be asked to the manse for tea after

we get the new minister. Dear! the preparations Mary Jane made for goin' to tea at the manse. She would wring the neck of the fattest chicken about the place, an' bring it all plucked an' dressed, an' mebbe half-a-dozen turkey eggs at the bottom of her basket. She always said the minister preached better the Sunday after she had been to the manse, for he had got a turkey egg for his breakfast. No, Mary Jane didn't affront them with what she brought."

How Christina's head ached. But there was no escape. She was a prisoner.

"Have you begun to get any patterns for your weddin' dress yet?"

Christina said "No."

"Blue would become you well, for you're of a light complexion. Mary Jane was blackavised, but I thought her the finest well-set-up woman that went up the aisle of Tough Meetin'-house. If I was asked, I could hardly take it on me to say which of you was the handsomest. Mary Jane an' me, we lived happy, an' only disagreed on one subject an' that was our stirabout for supper—I liked them thick, an' she liked them thin. But we soon came to hit on a plan that pleased us both—one night she would make them thin, an' that suited her, an' the next night she would put in an extra handful of meal, an' that suited me. Although I was in a sore way, an' lamented when she was taken, there was one thought that comforted me, that I would get my stirabout every night to my taste."

"How do you like them, Christina?"

She said she hated "them."

"Well, you can have anything else you conceit—a drop of buttermilk whey, now?"

Christina remained silent, and refrained from expressing any preference in the matter of supper. She was entirely exhausted—tortured—sick.

"Will you let me kiss you now, Christina?"

She jumped up in a panic.

"Well, you soon will."

Her father entered noisily, and she disappeared.

CHAPTER XVII.

CHRISTMAS DAY AT "THE HOLLOW"

Christmas morning was bitterly cold, a deep fall of snow on the ground accompanied by a keen frost. As had been the case since her "engagement," Christina awoke "while it was yet dark"; she who had formerly slept soundly, even after the necessary hour for rising, now awoke early with a consciousness of impending calamity, feeling as if a wave of the sea were engulfing her. She would then immediately spring to her feet and start to dress, and try to drown her thoughts in the process.

To-day she lingered somewhat, reflecting that there would certainly be some remembrance for her from Archie, and her distracted mind, dwelling on this delightful prospect, caused her to slip into a happy make-believe state between waking and sleeping—a sort of enchanted time.

It was not now a Winter morning of dismal outlook, but a deliciously sweet Summer day, and she and Archie were walking in the meadow. The birds were singing and the sun sparkling in the river. His merry brown eyes were looking down lovingly into hers and his arms were around her protecting her—protecting her from what? She started up wide awake now. Alas! alas! it was but a dream, and the daylight was coming in at the window to dispel it. If she could only turn round and dream it once more, and never wake again!

For on this day of all others everyone was supposed to be particularly happy, while her misery would be a

hundredfold intensified. Her prospective husband was, of course, coming to dine with his future wife's family. His Christmas gift had preceded him—a fine goose, the fattest of his flock—and as was to be expected, he was invited to partake of it with them at the approaching feast.

While washing up the breakfast things at the kitchen window, Christina kept a strained look-out for the postman. How late he was! Would he never come! Was he past?

It was the era before the universal Christmas card, and no one else in the house expected anything, or was giving a thought to the matter.

At last! At last! She caught a glimpse of him turning into the loanin', and she was gone to waylay him—dishes forgotten.

"Well, Miss McBriar, a happy Christmas to you. I see you're expectin' something, an' I'll not disappoint you."

"Thank you, James." Her eyes devoured the small packet he handed her. Yes, of course, it was Archie's writing.

"That's all, Miss." *All*; it was enough.

Coming in she met her mother in the door-way. "What on earth took you out-bye a mornin' like that, fit to freeze a fairy, an' not a thing round you, an' leavin' the water to cool on the dishes? We must make speed to get the goose into the pot, for she's a tremenjous big beast; I'm tired standin' over her 'drawin'' her. I'll leave it to you to stuff her."

"I will," promised Christina meekly, "as soon as I finish the dishes." But the last cup dried and put away, it was to her own room she stole and tore open

the package. Something glittering fell out—a ring—a ring set with blue stones; but so eager was she to read the letter that she scarcely looked at it.

"Dearest love,

I send you this little present, and am only sorry it is not reel gold, but I thought the stones resembled your dear eyes. I have got no reglar job yet, just workin' off and on, and hardly makin enough to pay Bella for my keep. She is good to me, but the times is bad and Jack doesn't know the day he'll be turned off himself. I trust in God that you're stannin' out agin marryin' that oul' fella; but, dear, I know well you would never do such a thing. Be true to me and I will be true to you to death. X X X X X X X"

She kissed the letter where the "crosses" were, and put the ring on her finger, saying: "Isn't it lovely just like the sky on a Summer's day. I'll wear it always where nobody'll see it." Searching, she found a piece of ribbon, slipped the ring on it, tying it round her neck under her dress. The feel of it on her skin strangely uplifted her. She sped to the kitchen to contend with the goose.

How important that bird was! At dinner Mrs. McBriar carved it with gusto, placing whacks on everyone's plate, while to their guest she served the Benjamin's portion. "Dear but that's the lovely goose, Mr. Jefferson," she exclaimed, when she got the length of putting the first bite in her mouth.

Mr. Jefferson looked gratified. "Aye, but that's the prime stuffin' you have in her inside, ma'am."

"That was Christina's doin'," returned her mother, proud and pleased to show off her daughter's accomplishment.

At this information Mr. Jefferson, with his mouth full, ceased to work his jaw, and turned in his chair to regard his neighbour with special admiration. "She's a grand hand at it, an' no mistake," he eulogized.

But Christina, hungering for no compliments in the matter, kept her eyes steadily fixed on her plate, yet seemed to be doing scant justice to the extolled bird with its marvellous filling.

The host contributed little to the conversation until he had despatched two helpings flanked by their accompaniments of the centre dish. When he found it impossible to get another mouthful down, and had scraped his plate clean and crossed his knife and fork, he leaned back in his chair and, inspired no doubt by the wonderful "stuffing," became amusingly reminiscent.

"I mind once when I was a youngster," he began, "that Christmas fell on the Sabbath Day, and in the hurry that always was of gettin' out in time to meetin', for my father liked to be early an' stand in the Green discoursin' about what happened through the week. Well, as I say, in the hurry wasn't the goose forgot to be put in the big pot hangin' to the crane, where she would sizzle till we come back. Martha thought my mother had put her in, an' my mother thought that Martha had, for she had stuffed her, and my father was belawrin' to Martha to stop curlin' her hair, an' to my mother that her bonnet was on straight enough, an' that nobody would look at an old married woman, anyway, an' at last he got them both out as quick as he could.

"Well, after the singin', and we had stood up an' turned roun' in our seats for the first prayer—a brave long one it was in them days, too—Martha's thoughts must have been more on the goose than the minister's petitions. Anyway, when he got to the 'Amen,' Martha whispers to my mother: 'Didn't you put the goose in the pot?' and with that my mother gives a jump, an' whispers back: 'No; didn't you?' Martha shakes her head an' whispers: 'What'll we do at all?' My mother whispered: 'You be to slip out an' run home as quick as you can, an' put her in, an' she'll be in time yet.' Martha tried to slip out, but dear hadn't she on a new pair of 'lastic-sided boots that squeaked with every step she took, makin' the congregation all look roun'.

"With that my father whispers: 'Is Martha sick?' 'No,' whispered back my mother, 'no, but she forgot to put the goose in the pot.' Sez my father nearly out loud, for he was affronted at Martha makin' such a stir in the meetin', sez he: 'They're a pair.'

"So, of course, comin' out of meetin' everybody was enquirin' about what ailed Martha, an' my mother just said 'she remembered she had forgot something.' Such a piece you never heard tell of on the Sabbath Day. An' when we come home, my father gave Martha as warm a rebuke as ever she got for brekin' the Commandment over the head of a goose, an' said he wouldn't lip it; but in the end he ate hearty of it, although it was as tough as my shoe with not gettin' enough of the pot. But in them days people had soun' teeth, an' we conquered her.

"On Monday mornin' who arrived but the minister—the man I was brought up under—one of the good old sort, but even better, for if anybody wasn't out of a

Sunday, they hurried over their breakfast on Monday mornin' before he'd come in an' ketch them. He come in thinkin' to find Martha mebbe at death's door, after the sudden attack she must have had in meetin'. My mother was a wise woman, an' never let on that it wasn't a faintin' fit, as he thought, for how could she tell a godly man like that that she walked out of God's House to put a goose in the pot. With that in comes Martha from feedin' the chickens, with her cheeks like roses, an' the good man said he felt relieved to see her lookin' so well, an' warned her not to walk to meetin' too quick again."

"Will you take a wee bit more of the breast, Mr. Jefferson, or mebbe a trifle more stuffin'?" asked the hostess.

"No, thank you, ma'am. I'm only afraid I ate too hearty; but the stuffin' was enticin', an' I didn't stop soon enough."

After dinner the younger folk went out to slide, determined to derive as much fun as possible while the frost lasted. It fell to Christina and her mother to "wash up," while the gentlemen remained talking in the parlour seated in comfortable chairs, one on each side of the fire. Very soon there was complete absence of conversation, the host's head fell forward, the guest's back, while peculiar noises replaced the former dialogue. Christina lingered over the dish-washing, and when she could do that not any longer began to tidy up the kitchen, till at last her mother said "All's well enough redd up now, come down to the room."

Their entrance failed to disturb the sweet slumbers

going on there. Christina tried not to see the cavity of her lover's wide-open mouth, which revealed more gum than teeth, nor hear the music emitting therefrom. She sat looking fixedly into the red heart of the fire, while her fingers fondled the love-token that lay warm on her breast, assuring her poor distressed heart as she did so that the All Powerful Loving Father above, Whom she had tried to serve, would never allow such an awful fate to befall her as marriage to this revolting spectacle opposite! No, a thousand times no. She would die first. "Prevent it, dear God," she prayed frantically in the gathering darkness, "and I will love Thee and serve Thee to my life's end."

Her father awoke first, yawned, and stretched himself. By and by Mr. Jefferson slowly opened his eyes and blinked, seemingly bewildered as to where he was at the moment. Then they fell on Christina and he smiled affectionately at her. "I b'lieve I must have dozed for a minute," he apologized.

"No harm in that," said Mrs. McBriar briskly.

"The goose put me over, too," confessed her husband.

"I hope, Mr. Jefferson, that you don't find the stuffin' dis'greeing with you?" anxiously enquired his hostess; "it's not everybody it suits, but you'll feel lightsomer when you get your tea."

She left to hasten the kettle, and Christina followed to collect the tea things and cut thick slices of currant loaf and carraway bread, and spread soda scones with butter.

The visitor did not consume much of this stuff. He gulped down his tea with loud smacks of appreciation, while the children fell to as if the goose had only whetted their appetites.

Afterwards came (gladly for Christina) more "reddin-up." She seemed to revel in dish-washing that day. Finally her mother had to send Nellie out to see what was keeping her. On joining them she found her father and Mr. Jefferson discussing the perpetually interesting state of affairs caused by the vacancy in the Tough congregation.

"There's no use in bein' too easy pleased," the Tough elder was saying, "we're well on now to the last candidate, but some are for one, an' some for another, an', of course, there's some bad feelin' gettin' up; but that's always to be expected, an' some threatenin' to leave if they don't get *their* man. As like as not we be to have a third list, an' in the end somebody'll be huffed. After all, we are only yet a matter of six months choosin'. When the Reverend McWheezy came forty years ago it took two years to come to a settlement, an' in the end some left. No, the Tough people are good Presbyterians, an' pride themselves on havin' minds and judgment of their own—we won't give in too easy."

Soon, to Christina's unspeakable relief, he said he must be going, for the moon would be well up now. Mr. McBriar told Nellie to fetch "the Book," and, after reading a chapter, requested his guest to "lead in prayer."

Now Mr. Jefferson possessed but one prayer that had served him well on all necessary occasions since being made elder. The prayer, however, evidently came easier to him than the getting up off his knees when it was finished. The difficulty, he explained, was caused by his joints being affected by the frosty weather. Christina remarked to herself, "By old age, you mean."

His host went out to harness the pony while his hostess fetched his "Ulster," warmed it at the fire, helped him into it, wound the muffler round his neck, and handed him his hat. Out of his pocket he produced a pair of woollen gloves, and was now fortified against the journey home. "Good-night, ma'am, an' I'm obliged to you for your good eatin' an' drinkin'. I just hope I haven't ett too many good things."

"Well," returned his hostess, "if you feel the stuffin' comin up on you, take a cup of peppermint tea afore you get into your bed."

Christina had then to endure the ordeal of a warm handclasp—it seemed more revolting to her than ever—but at last he was gone.

Her mother chased the little girls to bed. Her father and Bob also disappeared, and her mother and she sat down again before the dying fire.

This was surely the time to make a final and forcible protest. Christina summoned up all her courage. "Nothing on earth will ever make me marry that old creature," she said.

Her mother made a gesture of irritation, as though impatient with the foolishness of a child.

"Give over, will you, an' have wit. You'll never get a chance like this again. Such a settin'-down for you! It would be the proudest day of my life to see my cousin Julia an' the minister coming to see you and the fine place you have got—an elder in the church, too. If your mind's still runnin' on that ne'er-do-well, the sooner you stop it the better, for your father an' me wouldn't thole such a match. It would be an affront to

the whole McBriar connection, never to speak of my people, the McTurks. I'm away, now, to my bed, an' I'd advise you to do the same."

But Christina sat on in the firelight and drew the precious amulet from under her dress and put it on her finger and gazed raptly at it. Christmas Day, with its hideous lover and goose slipped into oblivion. Instead she was walking in the meadow by the river with Archie's arm round her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BELFAST

Christmas had come and gone, and Archie McKillop still lingered in Belfast, hoping to make the fortune he would lay at his beloved Christina's feet; but when his cousin's husband was discharged, and he saw no signs of any improvement in his own finances, he went back home to help on his brother's farm, where at least he would get his board, and obtain occasional jobs at country carpentry. He very soon heard that preparations for Christina's wedding were in course, but he was unable to hear the truth from Christina herself.

One evening shortly after he left, Jack Jamison and his wife sat before a small fire that was trying to keep the contents of a little three-legged pot boiling. They sat silent and looked woebegone.

Some time before there had been severe rioting in Belfast in the neighbourhood of their home. At that crisis there were two ministers of neighbouring congregations to the district where the rioters lived—Dr. Johnston, of Townsend Street, and Dr. Hanna, of St. Enoch's—who threw all their energy and influence into the unseemly fray in the interests of peace. It was said that these ministers were worth a hundred police. They went fearlessly into the danger zone, seeking out any members of their own churches, and extracting them forcibly, if necessary, commanding, exhorting, and persuading.

One evening Jack Jamison had his hand raised to throw a heavy stone, when he was deterred by another

hand grasping his beard, and a well-known voice demanding what he was doing there. Jack, taken aback, could only stammer that he was "out for a dandher." "Well, just dandher home, and I'll dandher with you," said his minister, taking him none too gently by the arm. On the way he had to listen to a lecture on the elements of Christianity, and on reaching his own home his friend pushed him inside, saying to Mrs. Jamison: "Bar the door, my good woman, and don't let him out again to-night, nor any night; he's a disgrace to me and to Townsend Street," and to Jack See and be in your place on Sabbath morning and you'll hear something you need badly." The minister slammed the door and went back to his self-imposed task.

This evening Jack and his wife tried to keep themselves warm, and gazed fixedly at the little pot boiling with one thought in both their minds: What would they do on the morrow, for this little pot held the last food in the house? What was there to say? There was no "dole" in those days, and two young children lay asleep upstairs happily unconscious of the desperate crisis. They had not suffered, as yet. Jack had given up his pipe, and Bella had denied herself almost to starvation point. Her complexion, that Jack in the old courting days used to compare with the wild June roses in the hedges of the lanes where they roamed around Kildarragh, now resembled more the old white cottage roses that clambered over her childhood's home.

Rising, she lit a candle, carried it upstairs, and found the bairns asleep. Shading it with her hand, she bent over them with an aching heart. They were little more than babies. How lovely they looked to the mother!

Bobbie, who was so stirring by day, lay still at last, one chubby arm thrown out over the counterpane. Jenny, her head a tangle of golden curls, smiled in her sleep. Tears sprang to Bella's eyes as she gazed on their rounded faces, so pure and innocent, as though they had not yet lost the radiance of the Angel Land. She thanked God she had kept them from suffering so far. But what of the morrow? She dare not ask the shops around for any more credit. Going down on her knees, and taking Jennie's dimpled hand in her own, she prayed in an agony of feeling: "O God, provide, provide for these little ones—Thy lambs." A stillness enwrapped her as she remained kneeling, as though God, Who answers "while we are yet speaking," had already granted her heart-wrung petition.

She was roused by a knock at the door, followed by the entrance of one who could not wait to be admitted.

Ah! she knew well that quick step, that hearty greeting. It was "William Johnston," or as he was also sometimes affectionately called, "Father Johnston."

When she came to the foot of the stairs, he was still holding Jack's hands, and came forward quickly to clasp hers. Had he heard of their trouble?

Dusting a chair, she placed it opposite the shining fender in which she had taken such pride. That it would be the first thing to have to go, she had already made up her mind. It would be more easily spared than anything else.

She had watched poor women, and oh! how she had pitied them, stealing into pawnshops, their ragged shawls barely disguising the fender underneath them. Now she, who had never dreamed it might come her

turn to enter such a place, had determined to face this shameful ordeal first thing in the morning.

"I suppose the bairns are in bed, Mrs. Jamison," said the visitor. He spoke so quickly that he almost stammered, for his thoughts outran his words.

"Yes, sir, they are."

"That's right, that's where they should be." He had no children of his own, but had constituted himself the father of the fatherless children of the church.

"Well, Jack, I haven't seen you except in meeting since the night I marched you home. Shame on you, man!"

Jack looked abashed and did not speak, and Bella seemed to have nothing to say.

How are things going with you? Neither of you looks very bright."

Jack remained silent, and Bella burst into tears.

"Is it as bad as all that?"

Oh! sir, it couldn't be worse," sobbed Bella; "I don't know what we'll do. Jack was paid off three weeks ago, and we have come to an end of everything. It's the children I'm thinking of. They haven't wanted yet, but we have come to our own last meal—some potatoes I put on for Jack and me, for we had little all day."

"Why, that's a capital supper, Mrs. Jamison. When I was a boy we used often to have potatoes for supper in our old manse in the country, and we children loved that meal. I'll wait till they're done, and if you let me, I'll join you. I never get them now for supper, and it would be a treat."

"But, sir, we have no 'kitchen' with them."

"Haven't you a grain of salt? Isn't that all the 'kitchen' a good potato needs?"

"We'd be proud, sir, if you would eat one with us. I think they're near done." She tried one in her apron, and then took away the pot to drain them.

Upstairs Bella ran, and from a drawer fetched her best table-cloth—her mother's wedding present—feeling strangely happy. Instead of a mournful meal, it was going to be a festive feast. They had little for themselves, but God "had sent them a guest," and the story of the widow that had so little meal and oil that she had learned about in Kildarragh Sunday-school came back to her. She laid her supper-table with the best of all she had, and invited the welcome guest to "please sit forrad."

All bowed their heads as the minister "asked a blessing" on the humble fare, and a blessing indeed descended. It seemed a sacramental feast, like the first Lord's Supper in the upper room. The poor victuals were transfigured by the manifestation of Christ's Presence in their midst.

And gay it was, too. Permeated by the spirit of buoyant joyfulness that "William Johnston" carried with him wherever he went, while his flow of words, that could scarcely keep pace with his thoughts, poured forth in a spate that dispelled depression.

He told them that he had been examining a class of small boys, one of their tasks being to repeat the first metrical psalm, that portrays the really upright man, when the youngest rendered the line, "nor sitteth in the scorner's chair," "nor sitteth in the corner chair." Said he: "The wee lad actually improved on David,

his idea of the upright man being an unselfish person who left the comfortable chair for someone else."

And Jack, who was ordinarily a silent man, began to talk of his young days in Tough congregation under the Reverend McWheezy.

"Was it he that made you such a fighter?" said the Doctor, with a twinkle in his eye.

Jack looked foolish at the question, but Bella said: "You're right, sir, the Tough people had always the name of fighters, an' now I believe they're at it again, over the choosin' of a new minister, an' can't agree on any one, I hear tell."

"They're enjoying themselves, I'm sure, in true Presbyterian style."

"Well," declared Jack loyally, "they'll never get the match of Mr. McWheezy, anyway. His explanation of the chapter was as good as another man's sermon. Aw, lovely!"

Bella also felt inspired to get back even further than her husband's reminiscences. Her mother, she told them, "often talked of the singing classes of her young days, where the good old psalm tunes were practised, and how they considered that it was wanting in reverence to go over and over the sacred words of the psalms merely for practice. So they composed rhymes to suit the various metres. I can only call to mind one or two that she used to repeat. One went:—

There is a hill in County Down
Hides my true love from me;
I bore a hole through Scrabo Hill,
And thus my true love see.

And another was :—

Eve was taken from Adam's side,
His helpmate for to be;
She was made of a crooked rib,
And a crooked help made she."

And the minister, who knew a few more of these curiosities of literature, supplied them with gusto.

All unforeseen it had actually turned out a hilarious supper-party.

The Doctor then asked Bella for a Bible, and read the portion that contains the oft-tested promise : " Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, yet one cannot fall to the ground but your Heavenly Father knoweth. Ye are of more value than many sparrows. The very hairs of your head are numbered."

The prayer that followed made their hearts glow again, for it came from a heart overflowing with human sympathy. Bella rose from her knees holding a corner of her apron to her eyes, while Jack looked steadily into the fire.

The minister said he must go, for he had another visit to pay that evening. He thanked Bella for her hospitality. Turning to her husband, he said : " If you would come round to the manse in the morning I could give you a job in the garden; you're 'frae the country,' and should know how to handle a spade."

" It's a spade he loves, sir," said Bella eagerly, " and I only wish he could get work in a garden."

" Well, we'll see about that. Keep up your hearts and trust in God, He will never fail you. Good night, dear friends." He slipped a half-crown into Bella's hand.

He was gone. They listened to his quick steps down the street, speeding to some other home to bring help and comfort. To them it was as the rustle of an angel's wings.

They sat down again. Was it the same world as before his visit? No. Verily one nearer Heaven.

CHAPTER XIX.

SUSAN STACEY'S DEATH.

Earthly marriage had failed to attract Susan Stacey's compliance, but a suitor not to be denied claimed her and led her gladly into that "fullness of joy," of which she had experienced a foretaste even here below.

Many a wetting had she undergone engaged on out-of-door work, and thought it a common-place happening, but she risked one too many. When a pain commenced to sting her side she did not think it worth while to mention it; her sister-in-law would be annoyed at her complaining, and her brother worried to think she did not feel well. So she kept silent, and no one noticed that her face was white and drawn and that she was eating little.

On entering the kitchen one very cold morning, Hannah Stacey was disagreeably surprised not to be welcomed by a bright fire and singing kettle, and stood still wondering what it meant, until Maggie, running in half-dressed, told her, that, on trying to get out of bed, her Aunt Susan had fallen on the floor, and she and Minnie had to help her in again.

Mrs. Stacey felt aggrieved at such an unwonted disturbance of household routine, and after lighting the fire herself went to Susan's room to see what was the matter.

Susan lay with her eyes closed and her breathing laboured. Little Susie, who always slept with her, was still fast asleep.

"Does anything ail you?" Hannah's harsh voice enquired.

"I don't know what it is, but I have a sore pain in my side, an' when I went to rise I got weak. Mebbe I'll be better in a wee while an' able to get up."

Instead she grew worse. Thomas suggested going to fetch Dr. Dodd, but his wife thought they should wait till to morrow. For once Thomas asserted himself and went.

It was too late. The doctor gave them little hope. Susan would never be well again.

On his way home the doctor drew up at the Manse gate. The minister was out in the front tying up the victims of the storm the night before. "You're a fine gardener, Mr. Adair," he greeted him; "I could give you a day's work."

"I wish I could overtake my own. This garden at the back is largely in a state of nature, but I try to keep the front more or less in a state of grace. Did you ever hear Spurgeon's story of gardening? He needed a gardener, and advertised. Among the numerous replies, one interested him most. It was from a man who believed in the doctrine of sinless perfection, and himself claimed to be perfect. Spurgeon thought it would be splendid to get a perfect specimen, for he had suffered much from the imperfect, and at once engaged him. After some months' experience, however, he decided to forego his services, for said Spurgeon: 'I found it would take a sinner to grapple with the weeds in my garden.'"

The doctor laughed, and then looked grave. "Did you know Miss Stacey was ill?"

"No. It must have been sudden, for she was out on Sunday."

"She shouldn't have been. She's dying."

Hugh was shocked and saddened. "What is the matter?"

"Pleurisy, just now, accelerated by years of hardship and hard work."

"She always appeared happy enough."

"Aye, and probably felt so; but unselfishness doesn't pay in this world."

"But it will in the next."

"Well, I leave that to you; my business is with this one."

On Miss Sharp's entrance bearing his dinner tray, the minister, for once, was able to impart the news.

"Poor Susan! I'm terribly vexed to hear that. If ever anybody in this world had a Christian spirit it was Susan Stacey, and cheery past the common, she that had more to complain of than most people, and never a kind word from that targe of a sister-in-law; that woman would make strife in Heaven. Even the children, that she wrought for early and late, showed her little gratitude—all but Willie, the eldest, who died just as he was grown up. He was the broth of a boy—his mother dursent say a hard word to Susan if he was in hearin', an' clever, too, at his books beyond anything."

"Why did she not leave them? She would have been better working for strangers."

"Ten times! But it was her home, where she was reared, and a godly home, for her father was an elder

in Kildarragh. Besides, she wouldn't leave Thomas, the henpeckedest man in County Tyrone, but as decent a soul as ever lived."

When Susan recognized the minister at her bedside, the light that shone in her eyes welcomed him.

"I only heard this morning that you were ill," he said, taking the toil-worn hand in his. "I hope you are not suffering."

"Not too bad, but I know I'll not get better."

"That is in God's hands."

"Aye, it's in good hands, an' I'm content whatever way it goes."

"You were always that."

"What would ail me? I knew that God loved me, an' Sabbath Days were like Heaven to me in meetin', singin' the grand old psalms that I knew off by heart. Many's a time I thought David must have composed them for me. My biggest trouble was when Willie died—that was the sorrow of my life. But I'll soon see him now."

"I'm told he was a good boy, and clever, too."

"He was all that. Willie could have been anything. He could have been a minister."

It was only at intervals that Susan was able to talk, and Hugh urged her not to attempt it.

"No, I'm hardly fit to talk, but I just want you to send Maggie in to say a poem about the psalms that I learnt off and teached them all. I would like to hear it once more on earth."

The minister called Maggie at her desire, and her father and mother came in also. All were gathered in

that poor little room, that was now the ante-room to glory. Thomas was in great distress, and Mrs. Stacey, who had been sitting by the bedside when the minister entered, seemed much affected at the prospect of parting from one who had never returned her anything but good, no matter what the provocation.

Maggie shyly recited the poem Susan loved to hear.

THE PSALMS

"There's lots of music in the psalms, those dear sweet
psalms of old,
With visions bright of lands of light and shining
streets of gold,
I hear them singing still in memory soft and clear.
Such pity as a Father hath unto His children dear.

"They seem to sing for evermore of better, sweeter
days,
When lilies of the love of God bloomed white in all
the ways,
And still I hear the solemn sound in the dear old
meeting flow,
*O greatly blessed the people are the joyful sound
that know.*

"No singing books we needed then, for very well we
knew
The lines and words we loved so well the dear old
psalm-book through.
To 'Coleshill,' at the Sacrament, we sang as tears did
fall
I'll of salvation take the cup before His people all.

And so I love the dear old psalms, and when my time
shall come,
Before the light has left my eyes and my singing lips
are dumb,
If I can only hear them, then I'll gladly soar away—
So pants my longing soul, O God, that come to Thee
I may."

Before next evening's sunset, Susan had joined the choir invisible and was learning the "new song."

CHAPTER XX.

MINISTERIAL VISITING.

And what of the deserted lover in his lonely manse at Kildarragh? He was still straining every nerve to subdue his aching, clamorous heart, yet withal not wishing her sweet memory to fade or even grow dim—that was his most precious possession for ever. He did not desire forgetfulness—anything but that. She was embalmed in his heart for life.

He still prayed for her, prayed that she might be happy, which was scarcely a prayer of faith, his better judgment assuring him at the same time that what he prayed for was impossible.

Fanny had confided that, while just at the first Eunice wrote her cheerful letters of her gay life in Dublin, and inviting Fanny to pay her a visit, by and by there ceased to be any hint of that, and later the letters ceased altogether. She often pondered the idea of taking a day trip to Dublin to reassure herself, but always arrived at the same conclusion, that it would be better not, fearing that it might only distress Eunice, and her father would be averse to her doing so, lest it should come to the ears of his old friend, Mr. Gordon. Therefore from every point of view she was helpless, and deplored it.

The Reverend Hugh Adair took refuge from his haunting sorrow in work, walking the length and breadth of his congregation, visiting the sick and the well, and making increased preparation of his sermons, that now revealed a deeper knowledge of the world's

agony. But while deeply immersed in his subject in the quiet of his study, as he imagined himself to be, a yearned-for face framed in dark curls would interpose itself between his eyes and the written page. Even as he prayed, that same vision would distract him. He wondered was this sinful. Then thought not. Thus passed slowly the days and weeks and months since that fateful morning in June. Now it was December.

As he sat at breakfast the postman passed the window, and after a minute or two employed by Miss Sharp in studying the one missive, she entered with it, having only gleaned from her survey that it had the local postmark and that the name and address were almost illegible.

In hopes of some enlightenment regarding this curiosity, she waited to pull the blind a little higher. Then she put on some coals, remarking that it was a very frosty morning, and swept up the hearth, all the while glancing at the recipient's face bearing an expression of amusement as he perused it. Finally she asked him if he wanted his boots.

"Yes," he did, "at once," adding that he was going to visit at a distance, requested her to keep back dinner for an hour or so, and put the letter in his pocket.

"Maybe you'll call to see Orange Bella before you come back, volunteered his housekeeper; "they say she's awaitin' on."

"Yes, I intend coming home that way and will visit her."

When she had left the room, he took out the letter and re-read it:

> "reverend sir i am more nor sory to have to tell you that i cant go to here you no more for the

komitee has gone and put me out of my sete me what set in it my hole life i bare you no ilwill i will go nowhere from this on it was mister macturk done it on me to be saved he is a very cross man I am better come home nor them it has been give to yours truly mrs pratt."

His amusement passed. The Reverend Hugh knew what an outrage it was to ask a good Presbyterian to vacate his seat in favour of someone else. In this case a man from a distance, with a large family of children, had bought a farm in the neighbourhood, and requested a seat in Kildarragh. None being available, and Mrs. Pratt's usually empty, the Committee decided to ask Mrs. Pratt (who was no longer able to walk to church) to allow them to have her pew for the purpose, and any one of them would welcome her to their own pew on rare Sabbaths she was present. Hence the grievance.

It was with some inward qualms that the minister set forth on this diplomatic mission to pacify the so deeply injured Mrs. Pratt. It was a long walk; there had been a sharp frost the night before. The ground was dry and hard, the air invigorating, so that the miles went past swiftly under his willing feet. The visit to Mrs. Pratt also involved others to "hearers" who lay in his path and whose abodes he dare not pass without at least "speaking in."

His stated yearly visitation, accompanied by an elder, was obligatory and, an annual event of high importance, did not bring him any special credit. The more extra calls your minister paid you, the greater your love for him. It was always a welcome shock to open your door and find the minister on the step.

The first house—almost a hovel—to claim him was occupied by one—Peggy Macardle—an old creature with a reputation well-deserved for uncleanliness, who subsisted on a few shillings per week of "out-door relief," supplemented by the kindness of neighbours, for she was a genial soul, if ever there was one, with good-will to everybody. He found her sitting on a creepie before a few smouldering sticks on the hearth, a mug in one hand, and a whack of butterless soda bread in the other. He urged her to go on with her tea, which she did, eyeing him joyfully, her jolly old unwashed face beaming.

"Now, your Reverence," she said hospitably, emptying the dregs of tea out of her mug on to the hearth, "I have a drop more tay in the tay-drawer, an' it'll do you good after your long tramp. Dear, what would we do only for the tay?" Her hundredfold wrinkled old face glowed with the thought of entertaining him. The suggestion was revolting to him, and infinitely more so when he watched her pour what was in the "tay-drawer" into her own mug. But she might think him proud if he refused, so he was forced to compromise on "just a very little, if you please." The house and everything in it was filthy, as well as her hands and face. The very mug she had been drinking out of was besmirched, but he took it from her without "turning a hair," for ministers are sometimes called to do penance, he knew. Then his good angel seemed to give him an inspiration—he would take it with his left hand, in order that his lips might not come in contact with where hers had been, and swallow a mouthful or two, and decline any soda bread, saying he never ate between meals. Gulping down what he hoped would

satisfy his hostess, he handed back the mug with inexpressible relief. Her merry old eyes twinkled as she said: "I'm glad to see, Mr. Adair, that you're just left-handed, like meself!"

After a little conversation, contributed largely by the hearty old lady, he knelt on the mud floor and offered up a prayer, slipped a shilling into her dirty palm, and thankfully found himself in God's pure air again, blessings and good wishes following him till he was out of hearing. He at least had had the satisfaction of having come across one happy woman!

A half-mile further on brought him to the homestead of Mrs. Willey and her four daughters. They and the servant-man were seated at dinner. He apologized for disturbing them, but was silenced—he was more than welcome. They were almost finished, just taking a drop of after-dinner tea, and there was plenty in the pot, and he would stand in need of a cup after that long walk.

Mrs. Willey deftly cleared the scoured deal table of potato skins and other unnecessary matter, a Miss Willey dusted a chair and set it at the table for him, a second Miss Willey placed before him a breakfast cup of lengthily infused strong tea, a third produced farls of soda bread and butter, while a fourth opened a pot of jam. Again he did his duty as a man and a minister, and after a decent interval he liberated himself on the plea that he had to go as far as Mrs. Pratt's, and was parted with reluctantly and thanked abundantly for his kind visit.

He did not feel quite so certain of such an agreeable reception in his next call. It was with some trepidation that he arrived at the objective of his travels.

Mrs. Pratt was engaged distributing a meal to a clamant congregation of fowls on the "street." On looking up she gave an ejaculation of surprise, wiped her hands on her apron, and condescended to offer him one, but her grim visage never relaxed its habitual expression of one that the world had used badly.

Her husband, crippled by rheumatism, sat by the warmest corner of the kitchen fire, and at the sight of his minister, Timothy Pratt showed unwonted pleasure, as indeed he always did at the sight of any fellow-mortal to whom he could talk, for he over-flowed with conversation and was lost for an audience, his wife usually ignoring any attempts made to engage her.

So he set about to monopolize the minister. Mrs. Pratt thwarted him by seating herself opposite, and broke in on her husband's trivialities concerning the weather, the crops, his pains, etc., and came straight to the point by asserting with the air of a dethroned princess: "I never thought the day would come that I would be disrespected in Kildarragh Meetin'-house."

"I assure you," the minister replied, "the Committee had no intention of showing you any disrespect."

"What did they mean, then, by doin' it on me?"

"They thought you would be glad, in the interests of Kildarragh, to oblige them by accommodating this newly-come family, which we are glad to receive, and allow them to sit in your pew, which is usually empty."

"They never asked my leave."

"I understand they offered you another sitting."

Mrs. Pratt's dignity increased by a toss of the head. "I think I see myself sittin' in any other body's seat. Such an affront as I got! but not one toe will I go to Kildarragh again, no matter who offers me a lift.

I'll just sit at home an' read my Bible from this on

But I needn't think it strange, anything that happens to me now, for I've had my full share of trouble all my life an' now, in my old age and grey hairs, my place of worship turns agin' me."

"No one can escape trouble in this world," the minister reminded her, and for a moment thought of his own.

"It's a lamentable world, sure enough," Mrs. Pratt agreed sincerely, "an' many's the time when I would be readin' in my Bible about the Flood, an' Noah an' his family bein' saved, I just thought to myself: 'Wasn't it a quare pity that Noah an' his family wasn't drownded too.'"

Hugh restrained his amusement as well as he could, and, to change the subject, remarked: "I am sure you are lonely at times, Mrs. Pratt, now that all your family are away?"

"'Deed I am not; how could I be lonely with seven pigs an' him?"

That was unanswerable.

The old man, who had failed to follow most of the dialogue, thought she was grumbling, as usual, about her hard work, burst out: "What I always tell her is, there's no use killin' yourself to live."

"It's easy for you to talk, but I always had the heavy end of the stick," declared his wife. "From I married him—even that very day I was put about before the whole meetin'-house full, for when the minister (a strange one that didn't know him) sez to him, 'Will you take this woman (meanin' me) to be your wife?' he never sez aye, yes, nor no, but just kep' lookin' up at the roof of the meetin'-house. So I be to take his

excuse—an' me the bride—an', givin' him a dunch, I sez to the minister, 'Your Reverence, he's deef,' an' at that a titter went roun' the whole place. That was a terrible affront I got that day, an the beginnin' of tribulation for me."

"Would you like me to read a chapter?" said Hugh, and, taking her silence for consent, he proceeded to do so, after which he and the aggrieved one knelt in prayer, and the crippled man removed the cap that always covered his head.

There is some mystical element in earnest prayer that purifies the atmosphere of all ill-will and unforgiveness and uncharitableness. As Mrs. Pratt rose from her knees she furtively wiped her eyes with her apron. This encouraged the peacemaker to propose a plan to end the feud between her and the Committee. He would attempt it anyway, so he started: "This is a very nice family that have come to us, and we are glad to welcome them. They were thinking of joining Killyclabber, but have decided not to do so."

"I suppose they were acquented with the Killyclabber man's preachin'," she suggested.

Hugh overlooked the insinuation, and continued: "I am certain they would only be too glad to have you in the pew with them any Sabbath Day you come, and I shall explain to them that it was your pew and your father's before you; that because there is no room any place else you are kindly permitting them to share it."

He saw he was likely to win his battle. "Where do you like best to sit in the seat?"

"In my own corner, where I always sat."

"That will be all right, then, Mrs. Pratt, and I'll tell them to always keep the old familiar place for you.

No one would like to see you leaving Kildarragh, you are such an old respected member, and I'm sure you'll find it pleasant to have these young people, for nothing is so gratifying as to see the young in God's House. It is a favour we are asking of you, and I'm sure you will be glad to do this kindness for the good of the old place you love so well."

She looked pleased and proud. "Well, Mr. Adair, when you have put yourself about so much about me, an' walked so far this cold mornin', I'll do it, just mind you, on your account, not on the Committee's."

"You don't know how pleased the Committee will be, and the people too."

She almost smiled. She was, then, of some importance in Kildarragh after all. "I'll make your Reverence a cup of tea."

While she was preparing it he talked to the sufferer in the corner, so anxious to gain a sympathetic ear. "But I'm ready to go," old Timothy kept repeating, I'm ready to go."

"That's the way he aye keeps on," complained his wife. He just deaves me with he's ready to go, he's ready to go. But I just tell him 'When you're here, Timothy, you know where you are.'"

The minister's "peace embassy" had proved so successful that it gave him strength and courage to surmount another cup of strong tea in celebration of a good morning's work.

He shrank from the duty-call on Orange Bella. Her spiritual outlook was so fantastic that it appeared useless. Now, however, that she was dying, he felt it was

incumbent on him to at least pray with her and try to prepare her for the Passing that was so near. Her self-sufficiency was rooted in the idea that she was "a good Protestant."

Alas! he found her almost beyond any powers of his ministration, but as he took the poor, wasted hand that had been so willingly active for a lifetime in his own, she suddenly recognized him, disusing her wandering mind to revert to the old delusions.

"It's gettin' near-han' to 'the Twelfth' I be to white-wash the house the morra, an' paint the windies an dure. I'll have it Protestant-lookin' boys but I will."

He knew there was nothing to be gained by talking to her, as she kept rambling on about the drums and the "field" and the Orange arches. At length he interrupted her by saying slowly and very distinctly: "Bella, you are very ill, and I am going to offer up a prayer for your soul." He bent over her so that she might hear him:

"O Heavenly Father, we who are Thy sinful children, come to Thee to seek Thy mercy and forgiveness ."

"King Billy was the boy that put the fear of God intil them," she responded. "Thonder he is on the wall, sittin' on his white horse, crossin' the Boyne."

He proceeded: "O grant Thy compassion on this poor foolish child of Thine, so soon to pass out into eternity . . ."

"Thon's Papishes passin' the windy now I know their step."

"Father of all, I commit her into Thy loving, merciful hands . ."

"Heigh-ho, the lily O, heigh-ho the lily O." Bella's voice rose to a shriek and cracked. She lay back, panting.

He saw it was futile to go any farther. Inwardly committing her to One Who understands all, he came away sad and depressed.

Said Miss Sharp, as she brought in his breakfast next morning: "Orange Bella's gone. She died last night, and do you know what her last words were—'Derry, Enniskillen, Aughrim, and the Boyne.'"

CHAPTER XXI.

CHRISTINA McBRIAR'S WEDDING DAY

To Christina McBriar the days seemed to fly, bringing her wedding day nearer and nearer. Now it was actually the evening before. No words could express her emotion. Blank despair seemed to paralyze her, so that she hardly knew if she were alive or dead. Her piteous appeals to both father and mother were ignored. Her mother had chosen her wedding gown—a handsome blue silk—and the dressmaker tried it on while Christina neither moved nor spoke. "I might have been fitting it on a statue, and my heart was sore for her," she confided to a customer.

With this charming gown she was to wear a hat with a long blue feather. Mrs. McBriar often pictured to herself her daughter walking up the aisle of Tough congregation on Summer Sundays in this elegant outfit, and thrilled with pride at the vision. How Christina would have loved this dress in normal times, the colour that Archie loved her to wear. Now she loathed the sight of it. It seemed a robe in which she was to be executed.

Her husband-to-be had just departed, having come over to make the final arrangements, and had held her limp hand at parting. She had never allowed him to kiss her yet.

Such a day of fuss and bustle The Hollow had never

seen. Just now Mrs. McBriar was putting the finishing touches to the board of the wedding feast, and in frenzied tones calling to Agnes and Nellie to fetch her this, that, or the other, for Christina, so capable at ordinary times, was like one walking in her sleep.

There was not going to be an extra large company, just their intimate friends, and, of course, Cousin Julia and her husband, who, assisted by the Reverend Hugh Adair, was to perform the ceremony. During the absence of Mrs. McBriar, Miss Sharp and a neighbour were to take charge of the last minute cooking operations.

The days were now lengthening, for it was February, and there was still a lingering light in the West window of the kitchen as Christina stood by the dresser looking absentedly at the row of puddings, golden with duck eggs, that covered it. The elder had extricated himself from the confusion by the simple expedient of going to bed, and Bob, running hither and thither at his mother's directions and counter directions, envied his father's selfish manoeuvre.

Peter, the servant-boy, deputed to tidy up and have everything spick and span outside, entered. "I have all out-bye redd up now, an' the street swep' clean," he said to his mistress. "Is that all you want done?"

Mrs. McBriar put a hand to her forehead. "My head's just 'dinlin'.' I have everything to look after, an' the master away to bed. Bob, take you a look round an' see that the place is fit for a weddin', for I wouldn't like to be affronted afore the friends that's comin', an' some of them's very remarkin'."

Bob disappeared to make a final critical survey, and Peter, passing close by Christina, slipped something

into her hand as he gave her a meaning look. When her hand closed over a slip of paper she came to life again. She took it to the window when her mother's back was turned, and read "Meet me in the meadow" That was all.

As she passed through the doorway she met Bob, who looked questioningly at her going out so late, but she avoided his eyes. Roger also seemed to wonder, and joined her. Together they ran through the orchard. Yes, Archie was by the stile. She was in his arms! Oh! the beauty and hush of that Spring twilight, with a new moon looking down on them. There had been much rain, and the swollen river rushed swiftly by, but the distracted lovers noticed nothing around them.

It was their last hour, "a madness of farewells."

"You will not do it, Christina?"

"What am I to do?"

"Come away with me now."

"Oh! Archie, my heart cries out to do that, but it cannot be, for I am not of age. Only for that I would marry you to-morrow, and beg the world with you."

There was nothing more left to say. She lay passive in his embrace awhile. He kissed her wildly. Soon she tore herself away. "I must go, Archie, I must, I must. But I will never do it, be sure of that. I am yours always—always." She fled.

He watched her out of sight in despair, then turned hopelessly away.

Christina lingered among the orchard trees, and looked steadily at the long, low whitewashed cottage that had been the home of her childhood, now glistening in the moonlight like snow. She would not return.

She must escape. She would foil them yet. There was another easier form of sacrifice for her. The river! It was her only friend and deliverer now. It alone could save her, and in the new world she and Archie would be reunited. At last she felt happy. She had not felt so happy for months as at this moment.

But an over-ruling Providence was as ever keeping watch over poor distraught Christina.

Mrs. McBriar, on returning to the kitchen, and not finding her there, sent Nellie to say she wanted her. Nellie came back, saying she could not find her.

"Where on earth has she gone to?" said her exasperated mother. "I'll not get layin' a side to bed this side midnight. The chickens aren't dressed yet. I left that for her to do. I'm near demented with the way she's carryin' on."

Bob remarked that Christina was out-by somewhere.

"At this time o' night? Away an' fetch her in." A slight alarm seized her mother.

On opening the door, Roger's excited barking in the meadow surprised him. Running down there, the moment Roger saw him he dashed into the flooded waters.

Good God! was that Christina in the river! Only waiting to throw off his coat, he followed Roger, who held her gripped tenaciously. Between them they dragged her to the bank.

With the limp form in his arms Bob mounted the hill as quickly as he could, while Roger ran around them

in circles barking so frantically that Mrs. McBriar appeared at the door to see what was wrong.

What a spectacle the light from the open door revealed to her. Christina hanging limp and wet in Bob's arms, and Bob himself also dripping.

She threw up her arms and shrieked. Bob managed to say, although panting and pushing past her to lay his burden at the fire: "She was in the river."

"Oh she's drowned!"

Mebbe not."

"Father, father," she shouted.

"What's wrong?"

"Christina's drowned!"

He came quickly enough at that.

All set themselves to try and bring Christina back to life. Her father piled on an enormous fire. Bob turned with all his might the wheel bellows that flared it into flames. The settle was drawn up before it and Christina placed on it. After holding her so that all the water inside her would come away by her mouth, almost frantic her mother knelt and put a hand on her heart. Yes, there was a slight flutter.

"Thank God! she is alive," she exclaimed, and sent Nellie and Agnes to fetch blankets off the beds, and to be quick—all they could carry. While they were warming, she hastily undressed her and gently massaged the poor heart that had borne to breaking point.

All this time the elder kept praying wildly, more earnestly than he had ever prayed in his life before.

As her mother pushed back the wet strands of golden hair from the lovely forehead and kissed it, Christina

opened her eyes and closed them again. Tears flowed freely as they all realized that Christina was indeed given back to them from the dead. The elder returned vehement and out-spoken thanks to God.

There would be no wedding to-morrow! Something must be done at once to countermand all arrangements made. Mr. McBriar said he would drive over at once and inform Mr. Jefferson. He alone must be told the exact truth. To others she was ill.

Early in the morning Peter would ride to Corrin Manse with a letter, while Bob would let the nearer guests know in time to prevent them starting.

So the wedding day came and passed for Christina in a state of dreamy ecstasy, such as she had never experienced in her life before, and was permeated by the blessed assurance that her Heavenly Father was indeed a Father of Goodness and Pity and Love.

CHAPTER XXII.

HESKYN'S DEATH

And what, all this time of happenings at Kildarragh, was the portion in life of Eunice Heskyn, the lovely, the merry, the beloved of all?

It had not taken her long to regret her wilful marriage and to discover that she was tied to a drunkard, and a gambler as well, and that life in a gay city of her dreams was very different, indeed, from what she had anticipated.

For one thing, she had lost all her friends and gained no others, loathing the fast set in which her husband moved. Nominally a Protestant, he had never had any Church connection. From force of habit she attended one church and then another in their district, then, tired of the unfamiliar service and the strange faces around her, lapsed altogether. She shrank from joining a church of her own Faith lest the minister, on becoming aware of her identity, and sensing her unhappy conditions, should perhaps comment on it to friends in the North and the story eventually reach Kildarragh.

At first her husband had been kind enough, and his better nature predominated under her charm and goodness for a time. He took her on little excursions to several of Dublin's beautiful and romantic surroundings, to concerts and to the theatre, and she saw *Romeo and Juliet* and *Lohengrin,* as she had longed to do. Gradually these welcome little attendances ceased, until

she was constantly left by herself evening after evening in that most wretched plight of one who listens for the unsteady step on the door-step, followed by the admittance of a stupified creature, who gave her little sign of recognition and none whatever of affection.

That he was also in debt she knew. Almost every post confirmed the fact. Although in a fairly good position, his salary was squandered, so that she oftentimes had difficulty in securing from him to provide even the ordinary necessities of their modest household.

He had, as he had promised, bought her a trousseau, of sorts, after the marriage, but when winter came, feeling the need of a warm coat, she had to lower her pride and ask him for the money. After all she had to content herself with a cheap garment bought after Christmas at the sales.

One hopeless day succeeded another. She kept wondering more and more how she could ever get on as she was doing, or what the end would be. Her infatuation for the handsome, fascinating stranger, of whom she knew so little before venturing her destiny to his keeping, was now quite dead. Gladly would she have left him altogether had she had anywhere to go. She had, at least, with him a roof over her head, and meals of a kind. She had ceased to write to any of her friends, and her silence spoke to them louder than words.

Unconsciously she was nearer deliverance from the thraldom of his company than she knew.

Heskyn, having lost his situation in Dublin a year and a half after their marriage, procured an inferior job in Birmingham. She had not much trouble moving, for it was a furnished flat in which they had lived,

and they found furnished lodgings where they were going—shabby, sunless rooms in a back street. They moved there in February, and in the bitter East winds of March, Heskyn took a chill that developed into pneumonia—the fatal disease of the drinker—and in three weeks' time Eunice found herself a widow.

She did honestly endeavour to feel some regret for the man whom at one time she fancied she loved, but the only reaction to his death, try and repress it as she would, was a feeling of intense relief that she was free again, although this was accompanied by grave doubts concerning her future existence. As she had foreseen, a comparatively small jointure remained to her after funeral expenses and debts had been paid.

But she was free! The magic of that word! Free as the prisoner who unexpectedly gets a remission of his sentence, and she would work for herself. She would teach young children.

But she had no references, and in a strange land where no one had ever heard of her or wanted her services, she, Eunice Gordon, required references!

Homesick and despondent, footsore and weary, she decided to return to Ulster, the dear homeland. On a breezy Spring day, with a glow pervading her whole being, she once more trod the familiar streets of Belfast, with the harsh Northern tones around her falling as music on her ears. She raised her eyes to the mountains that stand like sentinels guarding that busy mart, and murmured: "I will lift my eyes unto the hills," and to their Creator she humbly committed herself for hope and healing.

Up and down, up and down dull streets Eunice wandered for several hours till she was tired, looking

for some indication of rooms to let. At length in a street facetiously labelled Blossom Street she saw a card in a window announcing "Apartments."

A kindly oppressed-looking woman opened the door, disclosing a narrow passage, seemingly inhabitated by gaping children. On being questioned, she said Yes, she had a bedroom and parlour to let, and invited Eunice inside.

The parlour was minute. One could just manage to circumnavigate the centre table and no more. On a crocheted mat lay the large family Bible, and around it the young people's Sunday-school prizes. A bamboo table in the window supported an aspidistra looking in need of a drink.

The lodgings were clean and certainly moderate. She liked the woman's face, and at once decided to take up her residence here, at any rate, in the meantime.

Then began over again the old worry of looking for employment. Already there was a considerable hole in her little capital, and if it were exhausted, what was she to do? She resolved to be anxious for nothing, just trusting her Heavenly Father, to Whom she had come very near in her trials.

She had no success. The old lack of references again stood in her way. She, Eunice Gordon, needed a "character"! On applying for leave to teach the offspring of "ladies," who, she said to herself, would require tuition in the English language themselves, she was subjected to much humiliation.

After three weeks of vain endeavours, a powerful nostalgia took possession of her—a vehement longing to see Kildarragh once more overwhelmed her. To look on her old home, to stand beside her mother's grave

This urge persisted and mastered her discretion. Although she realised it would entail reckless expenditure on her part, she kept planning how she might accomplish this hazardous object.

The May Sacrament was coming on. She concluded there would be less risk of detection were she to go on that day. Almost everyone would be in the meeting-house at the long service, and the roads empty at that hour. She would plan it thus.

The chosen Sunday proved favourable. A sudden burst of heat had succeeded the East winds of the beginning of May. Rising very early, she was surprised, while she dressed, to find her hands trembling. She thought: "I was not so nervous as this that June morning I fled from Kildarragh with a confident, light heart. How many years ago? Scarcely two!"

She would go by train to Hightown, and take a car from there. It was only five miles. She had dressed in black since her husband's death, and now put on a thick veil. "No one would recognize me, I'm sure, for I feel changed, even if they saw me," she assured herself.

Nearing Kildarragh, she gave the driver instructions how to bring her to the places she so eagerly desired to see. How beautiful the old familiar countryside! The hedges gleamed white with hawthorn, as if a summer shower of snow had draped them. As she drank in the beauty that she had never so appreciated before, she quoted:—

"The hills are dearest that our childish feet have trod the earliest."

Her home came in sight, that spot that had kept calling her back. What a calm serene haven it looked

to the wanderer in a far land! She told the driver to stop for a few minutes.

It was strange to her that though she felt so changed, everything remained the same. Aunt Matilda evidently still took pride in her tulips that flaunted their gorgeous hues as of old. Some late daffodils in the clumps along the avenue on each side yet held up proud heads. The great lilac trees, purple and white, that dotted the lawn were in full dress, and the laburnums hung out their golden pendants to the warm, gently stirring breeze.

What was that? A bark! Her heart bounded. Well she recognized that glad, full-throated bark with which Towzer greeted his dearest. Oh to clasp her arms around his neck, to hide those fast-falling tears in his shaggy coat. If she could only get one glimpse of him! But no, Mary would be in the kitchen cooking the Sunday dinner, and Bridget might appear anytime coming back from "second prayers."

Towzer now had altered his tone to a plaintive whine. That telepathic instinct existing between canine and human revealed to Eunice unnerved her, making her at all costs try to close her ears to the pathetic message he was sending her, and sorrowfully and hurriedly leave it behind. "Turn to the left," she said to the driver, "and stop at a meeting-house."

A peculiar Sabbath calm seemed to envelop every object, as if a breath from another sweeter, serener sphere rested for the time upon it. No one being in sight nor having met anyone she might venture to look at her mother's grave. It was through an anguished storm of tears she saw that peaceful resting-place. Eunice had loved her above all others. Had she

lived all would have been different—or so Eunice fancied,—telling herself that she would always have taken her guidance. She wondered would they even allow her to lie beside her at the end? Perhaps not. She would be an outcast in life and death. She turned away, completely overcome by her feelings. Almost unconsciously her steps led her to the door of the meeting-house that stood open, as did the inner doors, by reason of the heat.

Leaning against the lintel, she strained her ears to hear, and to her inexpressible joy heard Hugh's deep earnest voice once again. He had evidently come down from the pulpit to administer the Lord's Supper.

Compared with the Presbyterian mode of the observance of this sacrament, after the simple manner of the Divine Originator Himself, elaborate ceremony or gorgeous ritual is artificial and out of keeping. The awed mystic silence of a large congregation come to celebrate the sacred rite, the bowed heads, the searching, solemn admonition of the minister who to the partakers distributes the symbolic elements, the rendering of the familiar appropriate psalms that accompany it to the old majestic tunes, endeared by generations of association, all combine to create a spiritual feeling of beloved contact with our Saviour and gratitude for His sacrifice for us, and a vivid perception of the Presence of the Holy Spirit can be felt in the midst. The strains of the pre-Communion Psalm floated out to the wanderer where she stood "outside the camp":

"I'll of salvation take the cup,
On God's name will I call;
I'll pay my vows now to the Lord,
Before His people all."

She knew they always sat as they sang it, while her father and Mr. McBriar were going round from seat to seat collecting the "tokens."

Hugh's voice broke the intense stillness that followed as he handed the elements to the elders to distribute. And when all had communicated, the elders and he did so afterwards.

In his address before the administration commenced he had stressed the wonderful love of the Father's giving His only Son and the agony of the Son borne for our salvation. Now after the rite he urged the necessity of those who had just pledged their gratitude and fealty to Him in the sacred cup of remembrance to show to the world that they had not done so unworthily or carelessly, and to endeavour, though perhaps imperfectly, to follow in His footsteps. "If ye love Me keep My commandments," he quoted, and avoid bringing dishonour on their avowed Lord and Master. So he ended.

Was there any crumb of comfort to fall from that rich feast for her? She clasped her hands and prayed that there might be. The answer, "while she was yet speaking," came.

"Never forget that if you do fail or stray through wilfulness and neglect of taking God's guidance on your earthly path, that God your Father yearns over you all the more. Never, never despair. You cannot wander further than whom the 'father ran to meet.' Forgiveness is the only one sure thing we can have for the asking in this world, and I beseech any of you who need it to claim it now—this very moment. Do not quench the Spirit while He strives with you, for He

may depart and never return. That is the unforgiveable 'sin against the Holy Ghost.'"

Eunice pictured her father sitting stern and unmoved through the address. Did it arouse one pang of pity in that earthly father's heart towards her, or had he thrust her entirely out of his heart and mind and life? That might well be. But there was aye instant forgiveness with One higher—the great loving Father of all His wayward, erring children.

Now uprose the concluding psalm of joyful thanksgiving:—

"O thou my soul bless God the Lord,
And all that in me is,
Be stirred up His Holy Name,
To magnify and bless."

She hurried away. The warm South wind stirred the fresh young leaves of the trees around the "Green," and rippled the growing grasses over the graves of those who in past Communion seasons had had a foretaste of what they now enjoyed. She thought: The happy, happy dead who have 'died in the Lord,' all life's problems solved, while she must still pursue her journey on the 'road that winds uphill all the way.'

Eunice yearned for one sight of her old lover as she more than ever to-day realized the disastrous mistake she had made of her life. Coming to a lane opening off the road leading to the manse, she asked the driver to drive up it a little way and then stop. From this vantage ground she kept an eager look-out. Yes, here he

came, hat at the old angle, hands clasped behind his back—the old attitude. Glancing casually up the lane as he passed by it, he did not give the jaunting car or its occupant a second thought. He went on to his empty manse on the hill, and she back to her lonely hiding-place in the city's heart.

CHAPTER XXIII.

EUNICE DISCOVERED

Summer passed unhappily for Eunice in that stifling city street. September found her still unemployed. Now surely, she fancied, that families are returning from the seaside, I shall be fortunate in securing some occupation. I would almost be willing to go as a servant.

Thus she pondered when she had changed her last pound note. Her landlady had begun to be concerned. She had always recognized Eunice to be a "real lady," scrupulous in paying her to the moment, yet buying, she considered, insufficient food for herself. Mrs. Bond feared her lodger might take ill from this cause.

She, good-hearted woman that she was, tried to think of a plan to help her in her necessity. Her lodger had not told her much about herself, but she had once let fall that she came from a place called Kildarragh. Mrs. Bond, being a member of Townsend Street congregation, decided she would request the Reverend William Johnston to find out the name of the minister of Kildarragh. She would then write to him in confidence.

The result was that a letter was handed Hugh one morning that he had awaked and come down particularly depressed. He recalled afterwards that on that morning in his "portion" for the day had been the promise: "I will turn your mourning into joy," and when he remembered the coincidence he gave God all his heart's gratitude for His faithfulness.

The letter outside conveyed nothing to him except that the handwriting was poor and the address peculiar.

His housekeeper's curiosity was rewarded for once, as she furtively watched him read it. She was immediately conscious of some strange transformation of the minister's countenance and even bearing. A light came into his eyes that she had not noticed for long enough, his whole frame seemed surcharged with a new vitality. The last two years seemed to have dropped from him like a burden fallen from his back. He actually smiled at her, such a smile as gladdened her heart.

"He has got a fortune left him for sure," she romanced, "and well he deserves it, for nobody but me knows what he has suffered." Had she known it, that somewhat dirty scrap of paper was to him worth more than all the silver and gold in the land.

Eunice was near and in need of him! It was believed in Kildarragh that she was in America. A man from Kildarragh, it was said, had seen her on one of the streets in New York! Hugh himself believed her to be dead.

"Fetch me my boots, please, Miss Sharp"—the very tones of his voice were changed—"I find I have to go to Belfast, and shall not, perhaps, be home till late."

"Finish your breakfast first, sir," she advised, "or you'll find the want of it before you get there."

He couldn't eat another mouthful, and presently she watched him stride down the avenue. First of all he would inform Fanny Sturrock. What a help and comfort Fanny had proved to him—the only one to whom he could mention the loved name.

The two miles to Deuteronomy Manse flew under his feet, as with a spring in his step and a joy in his heart he covered it.

"Well, you *are* an early bird," greeted Fanny.

"Yes, and a blithe one. Read this letter."

Fanny actually kissed him. "What is best for us to do?"

"I am going on the eleven o'clock from Castleferran. Could you come with me?"

Fanny shook her head. "Mr. Newcome and his bride are coming for tea, but I'll go to-morrow. You tell Eunice to have everything ready to come back with me."

"Here?"

"Of course—for the present, but I believe we can manage it that she will very soon be received at home. I know that her father's illness has done a good deal to soften his hard old heart, and as for Aunt Matilda, it is the hope of her life to get Eunice back."

He set out on his happy journey. No knight gallant of Arthur's court ever sped with more buoyant alacrity to rescue a damsel in distress, Fanny calling after him from the door step: "Tell Eunice I'll take no excuse, so she need not be inventing any."

The mornings and evenings had now got decidedly frosty, causing Eunice to suffer from the cold. She felt she dare not afford a fire in her sitting-room. Mrs. Bond often urged her to warm herself at the kitchen fire, but there were so many young Bonds claiming its services, and in the evenings, Mr. Bond himself, who, she fancied, did not welcome her presence, that she rarely accepted the kind invitation.

On this particular evening, feeling chilly, she had gone upstairs and had lain down on her bed and thrown her warmest coat over her. Her thoughts were not good company. She must sell her mother's watch to-morrow —she must—and that was her last link with home. She prayed fervently for help and guidance in her desolation, and, falling asleep, dreamed she was sitting under the pulpit in Kildarragh Meeting-house and heard Hugh proclaiming "Love is suffering."

She was awakened by a knock at the door. Mrs. Bond's broadly-smiling face appeared round it. "There's a clergyman downstairs to see you, Mrs. Heskyn."

"To see me! Who can that be? Did he give his name?"

"The Reverend Hugh Adair."

Eunice's heart gave one great bound, then seemed to stop beating. When she tried to rise she turned so faint that her sympathetic landlady had to put an arm round her to steady her.

Mrs. Bond gone, Eunice's first impulse was to look in her glass, tidy her hair, and with trembling fingers fasten a fresh lace collar around her neck, over the black dress that was now, she felt, so shabby, all the while asking herself while she did so: "Is it possible I still wish to look fair in his eyes?" She really marvelled at herself.

Slowly she went down the narrow stairs, stopped outside the parlour door imploring strength to enter. She could hear her heart beat.

Hugh was standing waiting. That was all she saw.

"Eunice."

He had intended to be very circumspect, but the old name slipped out unconsciously as he took her hand in

his. For a moment the rich colour flushed her cheeks, then receded, leaving her deathly pale, so that he was alarmed.

"Are you ill, Mrs. Heskyn?"

"Oh! no."

Followed complete silence as he placed a chair for her, and himself sat opposite.

"How did you know I was here?"

"Your landlady, Mrs. Bond, very kindly wrote to me."

"She never told me, but she has been very good to me since I came. How are they all at home?"

"Your father seems failing. The others are well."

"And dear Fanny?"

"Just the same as ever. She is coming here to-morrow."

"Oh! I hope not. I would rather my friends wouldn't come. Father wouldn't like it. You see, Aunt Matilda and Alice and Jim were forbidden to even write to me after my marriage."

"Well, you will see them all soon, I hope. Fanny intends taking you back with her to-morrow."

She shrank on hearing that message. "Oh! no, no, I never could go back to Kildarragh."

"You must. We are all longing to have you."

"But father?"

"My opinion, and Fanny's also, is that he would be glad, if he would only admit it. I may as well tell you that he is quite conscious of the fact that he may not be here long now."

Eunice burst into tears. "Poor father, I did him a great wrong."

"You have time to redeem it."

Her tears almost unmanned him, but she dried them and looked up at him with the old captivating smile that he could never forget. If he had loved the merry, headstrong Eunice, he loved a hundredfold more this new Eunice in trouble and tears.

She was hungry for news of the old place. He told her that Alice had been away at school for the past year. "She is at home now on account of your father's ill-health. Jim is still at Castleferran Academy."

"I am sure there are many changes since I left."

"Several, and some sad ones. Miss Stacey is dead."

"Susan gone." The tears again conquered her. "Oh! I cannot tell you how sorry I am; it will not be like the same old meeting-house without Susan."

"Yes, she is missed, I can tell you."

They talked of her patience, and even dignity, under trying circumstances, and of the comfort and help she so cheerfully gave to anyone who needed it.

Said Hugh: "She always reminded me of the text: 'As poor yet making many rich.'"

"And Gideon Blair? Is he married again?"

"He is, to an elderly widow belonging to Tough congregation, and said to be as 'near-begone' as himself. She brought him a hundred pounds."

"And did Christina McBriar marry the rich old elder from Tough, and leave the curly-headed sweetheart, who was so fond of her?"

"The day was fixed and all for Christina's wedding, against her consent, of course, but the marriage actually didn't come off. Something happened almost at the last minute. There are strange rumours, but nobody seems to know the exact truth. However, Archie McKillop's old uncle has at last taken him to live with

him, and, it is understood, will leave him the place. In that case her father could not very well withhold his consent—seeing they were such staunch lovers. At any rate, she is now twenty-one, and can defy him."

"What about Samuel Nethercote? Is he married yet?"

"No, nor never will be. He is the sort that always talks about it, but puts it off, although it is said that he actually did ask Miss Stacey, also that Gideon Blair proposed to her, and that she refused both."

"Bravo, Susan!"

Like a tonic to Eunice was this home gossip. She forgot she had so lately been lonely or cold. It seemed to warm both body and heart. The blood pulsed again through her veins. Her hands and feet glowed.

"Well," said Hugh, "it is time for me to catch my train, but I will see you very soon. Fanny commanded me to impress on you that you must have everything packed when she comes, and be ready to start. There is no use trying to resist when *she* determines on any course. Fanny must have her way."

An altogether different Eunice mounted the narrow stairs again.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE HOMECOMING.

"Father," said Fanny Sturrock next morning at breakfast, "please put down whatever you are reading and listen to me for a few minutes. I have something of importance to say to you. Eunice Gordon that was —Mrs. Heskyn—is in Belfast, and I am going there to-day to fetch her back here with me."

It was the morning of the meeting of the Castleferran Presbytery, and the thoughts of the Reverend Jeremy Sturrock were entirely centred on its business agenda. There happened to be a resolution coming before that body for consideration, to the wording of which he had taken exception, and he had carefully prepared an amendment, more suitably formed, in his opinion, and less open to misunderstanding. He looked up absently as Fanny's voice reached him, but did not grasp exactly what she meant to convey. She saw that, and repeated it "I am going to Belfast to-day, and will bring Eunice Heskyn back with me."

"Why, my dear," he remonstrated, "how do you know she is in Belfast, and if so, why should you do such a thing? Remember, she was the source of a very serious scandal."

"There was no scandal. She merely fell in love (or thought she did) with an unworthy man and married him."

"She disobeyed her father."

"When did I ever obey you?"

"I have never known you to do otherwise. You have been everything I could have desired in a daughter, since you were left so young to take charge of this household, when mamma was taken away from us, and I have never found you to fail in your duty. Always remember I said so when I, too, am taken home."

"Thank you, father, thank you. I will, indeed; that shall be my happiest reflection. But please listen to what I have to say now. Eunice Gordon was my best friend, and what is a friend for if not to help another. You have preached a long time to me, and now I am going to turn the tables and preach to you."

"Well, well, she may be repentant, and if so, it is our duty to forgive her."

"There is nothing to forgive. She was more sinned against than sinning. It is her father who is largely to blame. Had he not been so strict and tyrannical, this might never have happened."

"But her father may not approve of you bringing her back to the neighbourhood."

"I don't intend to consult him, although both Mr. Adair and I are convinced that at heart he would be downright glad. He has failed since the very day she went away. Mr. Adair went to see Eunice yesterday in Belfast, and he approves of what I intend doing."

"Well, in that case I have nothing more to say. It is time I was going, but I must first see Alick and give him instructions as to what he is to do in my absence."

On coming home that evening, Mr. Sturrock found a slender figure clad in black sitting by his fireside, a

rather subdued figure, as if uncertain of what the minister's attitude towards her would be. He welcomed her kindly, hoped her health was satisfactory and that she had had a comfortable journey. "Fanny and I rejoice to have you back with us again," he added after a minute.

At this rather awkward juncture Fanny created a diversion by calling them to come to the tea-table.

After the "blessing" he plunged into a minute account of that day's proceedings in the Presbytery. "My amendment," Fanny, was unanimously adopted," and went on to explain to Eunice the nature of the question under discussion, and for once Fanny was grateful for the exciting topic of Presbytery doings.

When tea was over, he excused himself to the guest, saying he must interview Alick and hear what had been done outside; harvest time was an excessively busy time, but God was sending them His blessing in the good weather fitted for its safe ingathering.

From consultation with Alick he went to his study, and did not again appear until time for "worship."

Fanny and Eunice sat in perfect happiness, not talking much, just satisfied to be together again.

Eunice enquired how Mr. and Miss Lovekin were.

"Just the same as ever. Poor Arabella has got another thorn in her side, now; you would never guess who it is—just your Alice. As Alexander grows older he likes them the younger, I fancy. Being away among other girls at school has taken the primness a good deal out of Alice. I do believe she means to marry a minister—not Alexander, however. But like us all, she delights in keeping Miss Lovekin on pins and

needles. As for me, I wouldn't marry him if he was the last man in the world."

After conducting "worship," Mr. Sturrock bade them good-night. He wished to retire a little earlier, for he had a funeral in the morning at a distance. "And you also, Eunice," he advised, "would be better to try and get a good night's rest after your journey."

But Eunice slumbered little that night for sheer happiness.

That same afternoon the Reverend Hugh Adair had come down the hill from the manse with a light step, yet a serious countenance. In front of him lay rather an appalling task. He was on his way to Kildarragh House to try and effect a reconciliation between Mr. Gordon and his erring daughter.

Mary showed him into the cosy little "den," where the "master" spent most of his time now—a sort of study-library-office that had always been recognized as his own peculiar possession, where he had written his letters, done his accounts, and interviewed those who came to seek him on business. Here a fire now burned, winter and summer.

His face brightened as he looked up and heard who his visitor was. Hugh's calls were frequent of late, and most welcome to the semi-invalid, largely shut in to a somewhat monotonous existence.

They settled down, as usual, for a talk on the passing events of the neighbourhood. Hugh related to him the substance of what had transpired at that morning's Presbytery meeting, and both agreed that Mr. Sturrock's

amendment was an improvement on the foregoing resolution. But underneath all the give and exchange of ideas, his sub-conscious mind kept fixed as a leech on the real object of his visit. Sometimes it actually suggested to him that he should put it off, that he really could not broach the subject just now. Then of a sudden he defied it, and consequently, seizing desperately a pause, said in an unhesitating, clear voice that belied his quaking feelings: "I suppose, Mr. Gordon, you know that Mrs. Heskyn is in the neighbourhood, and is at present staying with Miss Sturrock?"

He immediately sensed a stiffness of his hearer's whole bearing; the very air of the little warm room where they were sitting seemed to have been smitten with a severe frost, and Mr. Gordon's icy tones replied "No, I was not aware of the fact."

This was not encouraging, to say the least, but Hugh blundered on with false assurance.

"I should desire above all things that you would be reconciled to her."

"She has not sought my forgiveness."

"Perhaps not in words, but I know she is waiting and longing for it, and I would gladly be the messenger to her of these good tidings."

The silence that followed was awesome and embarrassing, happily broken at length by the entrance of Miss Gordon.

After shaking hands with Hugh and seating herself, her brother turned to her and said: "Did you know, Matilda, that Eunice was staying with the Sturrocks?"

It was the first time he had mentioned her name since she left.

She faltered that she "had heard."

"Mr. Adair has just begged me to forgive her."

"Oh! Henry, you will?" Aunt Matilda burst into tears.

Mr. Gordon seemed himself unable to hide emotion. His voice sounded somewhat husky when, after a few minutes, he got out with difficulty, "I may."

"That is splendid of you, sir. Then I may tell her that you would like to see her?" urged Hugh warmly.

The proud man hesitated, and after a moment: "Yes."

"And, Henry, mightn't we have her here at home again?" besought her aunt.

"I . . . would . be . willing."

"To-morrow?" she pressed.

He bowed his head to signify assent.

"Mr. Adair," said Miss Gordon, "you have been very kind, and I cannot express how grateful we are to you. Will you please ask Fanny to bring her over to-morrow with all her belongings. Patrick will go over for them in the afternoon. And tell her how very happy it will make us. This has been a sad house without her since she left."

September—that perfect month for a homecoming. The home-tree safe beneath the roof-tree before Winter's storms and chilly nights. The good old earth had proved true again to her Maker's promise—there had been seed-time and harvest, a sense of fulfilment over everything. Faith is strengthened and deepened in His love and care for us. So we face the storms of

life as we are prepared to meet the Winter's cold blasts with renewed courage and hope.

The September sun—friendliest of all the year—welcomed Eunice warmly back to the old home. The familiar trees that she had last looked at through tears in all their fresh green bravery, wore now a richer garb of bronze and gold. Like a scarlet cloak to the walls of the grey old house hung the Virginian creeper, and all nature had on its most gorgeous hues of the year.

At the gate stood Alice and Jim watching for her. Alice had hugged her and kissed her again and again. Eunice could scarcely believe that the handsome young lady, with her hair up and long skirts, was the lanky schoolgirl she had left behind two years ago. Jim also had grown out of all knowing, but the same round, pleasant face looked at her steadily with the love-light in his eyes that so resembled her own. It was she who kissed him, and he bore it manfully. Although he could not say it, she knew there was gladness in his heart. Most demonstrative of all the welcomes came from Towzer. His exuberance impeded every step of her progress up the avenue to the steps, where her father and Aunt Matilda waited. The latter came running and puffing to meet the dearly-loved home-comer and clasp her in her arms. But when she reached where her father stood she could scarcely lift her eyes to his face. When at last she ventured, she saw it looked more gentle than she had ever seen it before. He kissed her, led her inside by the hand across the hall into the drawing-room, where a glowing fire also added its quota of warm welcome.

Such a fuss as they made over her. Alice took away

her hat and coat, an Jim hung about her not knowing what exactly was expected of him, but ready to do it.

And not one word or look of reproval. She could almost hear the "Bring forth the best robe and a ring on her finger." Aunt Matilda hurriedly left the room "to see about the tea," she said, but it was chiefly for another reason.

To cover any awkwardness that was likely to arise in the situation, Fanny talked volubly to Mr. Gordon about the weather, and the harvest, and the Presbytery meeting of the day before in pretence that there was nothing extraordinary in the circumstances, and when tea was over said she must go, for her father didn't like her to be out when he came home from his visiting, and disliked to have his tea alone above all things.

Eunice followed her into the hall, and whispered: "Fanny, how can I ever thank you?"

And Fanny opened her eyes very wide, and enquired: "What for?"

All the old friends were not long in calling. First to arrive were Mr. and Mrs. Starritt, bringing baby Margaret, a now restless run-about, who, after a critical survey of the new acquaintance, decided she was a satisfactory person to become better acquainted with, sat contentedly on Eunice's knee, and pressed her curly head to her breast.

Next came Mr. and Miss Lovekin, the latter saying that the walk was rather fatiguing for Alexander—his back was far from strong—and Mr. Gordon at once said that Patrick would leave them home. Arabella did not look at all at ease during the visit, for her

precious brother seemed to be paying more attention to Mrs. Heskyn than to anyone else, and called to mind what she had often heard, that widows were especially dangerous. She fancied Eunice looked prettier than ever she had seen her before, and feared she might attempt to fascinate Alexander.

Miss McGeorge, true to her röle, invited Miss Gordon, Eunice and Alice to tea. She also requested the company of the Reverend Hugh Adair and Miss Sturrock on this select occasion. Hugh, for once, accepted the invitation with a degree of pleasure, of which Miss McGeorge suspected, but was not even fully aware.

It proved a delightful entertainment to hostess and guests—the most successful she believed she had ever had, and she received them in the latest creation that had come from Cousin Emma's wardrobe, and entertained them by relating incidents in the life of her beloved uncle, the Reverend Moses McGeorge. She did really amuse them by describing Samuel Nethercote's abysmal ignorance of the meaning of her uncle's much-prized engraving of "The Diet of Worms" that hung over the mantel-piece.

On Miss Gordon's enquiries as to the bearing and character of her present youthful retainer, Miss McGeorge regretted to say that she had encountered a disappointment in him. He had promised so satisfactorily at first that she believed he would be a real treasure, but was now so rapidly deteriorating that she was looking forward with thankfulness to the end of the quarter that she might make a change. So exalted in mind did she feel at the success of her notable tea-party that she scarcely slept that night.

Eunice's home-coming seemed to revive her father during the Winter, as she devoted herself to cheer and comfort him, but when Spring once more began to call the old world to clothe herself anew in fresh raiment, there was no response to her revival in his heart. His day was done, and he knew it, and was content to go, satisfied that his straying daughter was safe back in the fold.

Yet another Spring stirred the earth to beauty ere Hugh could persuade Eunice to share his home and bring into his life inestimable happiness as compensation for the years that the locust had eaten, yet far from unprofitable years that taught him heartfelt sympathy with the sorrowing, and made his ministry abound in the comfort and consolation so much needed by pilgrims on their journey through troubles and hardships to a glorious land where "all tears shall be wiped away."

"I love you, Hugh," she confessed; "I always did, but your people might not like it."

Far otherwise thought Hugh's "people." There was no home clouded by sorrow but "Miss Eunice's" entrance helped to lighten it, and no traveller about to set forth on that last dread journey, from which there is no return, but was strengthened to undertake it as "Miss Eunice" sat beside the bed and sang:—

There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains.

L'ENVOI

Life at Kildarragh Manse is gay and sweet, dominated by love and service for all. Fanny is the most welcome and beloved guest, and often declares that the only man for whom she would ever have relinquished her freedom is the husband of her dearest friend. Mr. Lovekin pays his customary compliment regarding her, and says: "A merry heart doth good like a medicine."

THE END.

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